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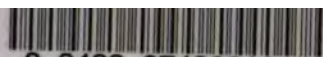
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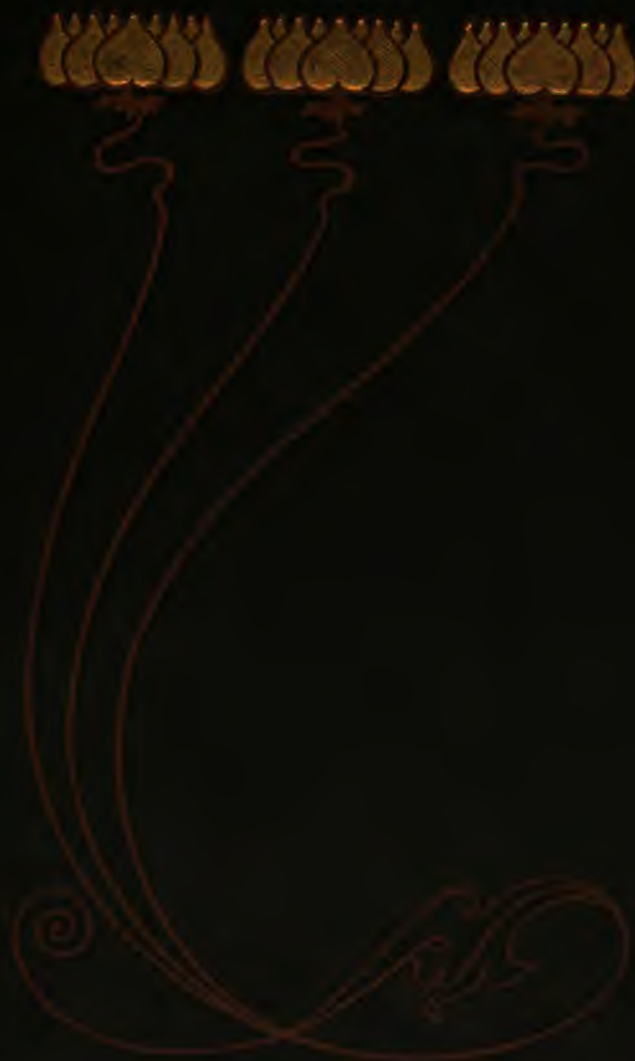
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& TOW



no subject

6.

**FIRE AND  
TOW . .**

NCW  
Milton





# FIRE · AND · TOW

By · G · E · MITTON. Author  
of "A Bachelor Girl in London" .

4

"For man is fire and woman is tow  
And the somebody comes and begins to blow"  
LONGFELLOW

J

LONDON  
HUTCHINSON & CO  
34, PATERNOSTER ROW

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*McClellan - 11 September, 1965*

**To**  
**THOSE OF THE INNER CIRCLE**  
**(SEE CHAPTER V)**

## GIVE ALL TO LOVE.

GIVE all to love ;  
Obey thy heart ;  
Friends, kindred, days,  
Estate, good fame,  
Plans, credit, and the Muse,—  
Nothing refuse.

'Tis a brave master ;  
Let it have scope :  
Follow it utterly,  
Hope beyond hope ;  
High and more high  
It dives into noon,  
With wing unspent,  
Untold intent ;  
But it is a god,  
Knows its own path,  
And the outlets of the sky.

It was not for the mean ;  
It requireth courage stout,  
Souls above doubt,  
Valour unbending ;  
Such 'twill reward,—  
They shall return  
More than they were,  
And ever ascending.

EMERSON.

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# FIRE AND TOW

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## CHAPTER I.

### *A SOUND BASIS FOR A HAPPY MARRIAGE.*

"And Love is Master of all Arts,  
And puts it into human hearts  
The strangest things to say and do!"

LONGFELLOW.

SHE looked at him with vague surprise. "You and I?" she asked; "but we know each other much too well, there would be no romance in it. Besides, I thought that you disapproved of many things that I do."

"It doesn't follow that I disapprove of you," he said decidedly.

"And you think that as my husband you would be able to eradicate my little failings; is that it?" she asked, smiling; but the smile faded away when she spoke again. "Seriously, Archie, people do not change their natures by the process of marriage; I should be just the same woman, having moods of wayward madness, and only weighing your protests a little in the balance as I do now because you are my cousin and adviser." Her manner became unexpectedly energetic as she added: "Also, I hate you at times, positively hate you."



## Fire and Tow

She leaned forward slightly, so that her clear-cut face came within the area of yellow light that spread beneath the shade of a standard lamp ; and the lamp-light, shining on her bright, large eyes, revealed an expression of unflinching defiance directed at the man standing on the hearth-rug before her. She had exhibited as many phases of emotion as there were minutes in the last quarter of an hour : she had danced from grave to gay, from comedy to deep seriousness with bewildering rapidity, and the man had shown but one mood of unvarying earnestness.

"I don't think I have ever hated you," he said meditatively, "though I grant that you madden me sometimes. But, Marion, you don't suppose that at our ages—yes, ours" (dogmatically) ; "for you are just as old for a woman as I am for a man—that we require fiery sentiment or passion ? I love you, dear, more than you can ever know, and that should be enough." His voice was a little husky, and in contrast with the immovable stolidity he had hitherto displayed, the slight indication was singularly forceful. He had not the appearance of a man who was easily stirred, for his eyes were keen, small, and hard, showing a temperament without deep emotion, and his hair, which was parted in the middle, matched in greyness the grizzled moustache, and marked him as being past the flood-tide of youth and the time when passion is lightly provoked ; otherwise he was squarely built, rather under than over the middle height, with nothing to differentiate him from dozens of men of his own standing.

The unwonted betrayal of emotion was not lost upon Marion ; she moved a little nearer to him without rising from the sofa, and as she laid her hand on his arm her voice was tender, but her words were those of an untransmutable comradeship. "My dear fellow," she said, "my dear Archie, I didn't know it was like that."

## A Sound Basis for a Happy Marriage 3

He answered nothing, and she came a little nearer still.

" Archie, I am so sorry, it never occurred to me ; but it's of no use. I am not made for love, I am too wild. There are times when I am frightened at myself, when the devil seizes me, and I would do anything for the sake of excitement and mad daring ; then I can understand the women who go even to the depths of hell for the sake of gratified ambition, of power and triumph. It is only because I have had other outlets that the mad spirit has not before this ruined me. If I had been a man I suppose I might have been what is called ' a bit wild ' and no one would have thought the worse of me, but in a woman these wild impulses are destruction. No man has ever or could ever make allowance for them in the other sex, no man could understand a woman in these moods. You have never seen me in one, have you ? "

He felt her fingers clutch his coat-sleeve and he nodded without looking at her.

" Ah, yes," she continued, " but that was years ago, and you have cheated yourself into the belief that now I am over thirty I have sobered down ; you are wrong. I think that the one bad fairy who came uninvited to the christening, in bitter irony gave me a draught of perpetual youth, so that at eighty, if I live so long, all the vital force, the high spirits, the restlessness, so incongruous with a decorous age, may burn in me still."

" Marion," he said soberly, " you talk yourself into believing these things. Your high spirits may have led you into mischief when you were little more than a school-girl, but now you are satisfied and happy in the life of a cultured woman."

Her gesture of repudiation was scornful as she continued in the same tone : " But all this is only one aspect ; there is another and a much more serious

obstacle. I cannot love. It's quite true, Archie. I like you, dear old man, I do indeed—if it were the choice between your death and mine to-morrow, mine it should be gladly—but I have never been in love, I was born without the faculty for it. I envy those who can love, but for me it is not. My art is my master. Oh, the domination of it! I analyse, cut up, and dissect every human being that comes my way, to make a book. I offer my most cherished emotions, my tenderest experiences on the altar—all must go, whether my own or another's; even you, if I saw dramatic possibilities in you which I never have done until to-day.—Nothing is too sacred; this scene may serve a turn. Now who could ever love a woman who is like that? I am showing you myself as I am, that you may get over your feeling for me. In my life everything is pitilessly held up to the light, there is nothing too tender to probe; sensation and experience are but the materials for a future book. Now do you hate me?"

"Yes, I do," he answered unexpectedly, "when you talk like that. But I know that it is only that you get excited and lose your mental balance, for you are in reality eminently sane. You are trying to pose as a heartless woman of the world when your heart is as wide and deep as the sea. Bah! What affectation! Is that plain speaking enough for you? I tell you that all this success is spoiling you, you see people devour your words, and you hear yourself quoted, so you can't be natural, but instead you create a character for yourself and clothe yourself in it. I would smash your literary reputation to atoms if I could."

The thought that he was jealous of her literary work, and wished her to devote herself entirely to him crossed her mind, and a momentary tenderness and a certain yearning to hear him say again in that unique voice, "I love you, dear, more than you can

## **A Sound Basis for a Happy Marriage 5**

ever know," faded away, and left her cool and self-contained. She spoke aloud, carrying on the thread of her previous words and ignoring his fulmination. "But after all it doesn't make life any less real to me, it does not reduce living people to puppets, but rather raises the puppets of my imagination to the level of living people."

He laughed suddenly and unexpectedly. "You are yourself and always will be!" he said. "But for a mass of incongruous absurdities you would be hard to beat; perhaps that is why I want——"

He tried to force himself to complete the sentence, failed in the attempt, and five minutes later was bidding her good-bye in his ordinary manner, with as little sentiment as if there had been no such thing as a proposal of marriage between them. The wave of distress in which he had found her submerged had startled him out of his usual stolidity, and now that he saw her restored to her normal state he was ashamed of the self-betrayal he had made.

Marion Halsted had lived her own life from the earliest date of her remembrance, to her the freedom for which women have struggled and fought had been granted as a gift. Her father and mother had both died before she reached her sixth year, leaving no provision for their only child, but she had not thereby been forced to tread the stony path usually allotted to penniless orphans, for her father's eldest brother, a wealthy bachelor, had adopted her, and queen of his heart and home she had been whilst he lived. Being a strong-willed, high-spirited girl she had completely ruled him, and like many a slave before him, he had loved his bonds, all the more that he wore them voluntarily. Some men, who are without actual religious profession, are yet virtuous by reason of a strong sense of justice and an unobtrusive pride which is the very root of honour and

generosity. Such a man was Jacob Halsted. His friends sometimes mocked when they saw him always in attendance on his straight-limbed, defiant little niece; but admiration was not altogether lacking either, for there was something to be said for a man whose life could bear the scrutiny of a sharp child's eyes, and who found in a little girl's society all the relaxation he needed.

But if Jacob Halsted was the sun in Marion's childish life, Philip Denver was the moon. Philip was her cousin on the mother's side, and as he received his education at Winchester College, and Mr. Halsted's country house was only a couple of miles from the town, it was not long before Mr. Halsted found him, and brought him out as a playmate for Marion, who was then about eleven years old.

"Here's a new companion for you," he said, as she ran boisterously out to greet him. Marion looked at the handsome fair-haired boy, who was perhaps three years her senior in age.

"Where did you find him?" she asked doubtfully.

"He is a relation of yours, monkey—a cousin."

"And is he a relation of yours too?"

"No."

"Then I don't want him for a relation of me at all."

Nevertheless Philip won his own place in the rebellious little heart, and for the next six years found his way to the house on all possible occasions. Marion at first tolerated him with an easy condescension, too proud to acknowledge that his society was pleasant to her; but finally she avowed her preference, and "Philip too," or "Get Philip one," was the invariable corollary to any treat or gift designed for herself. In mind Philip was Marion's own counterpart, he looked on the world with the same eyes as she did, and delighted in the same subjects. Sprawling on the ground beneath a tree, or seated in its branches on Sundays and Saints' Days he read aloud to her,

## A Sound Basis for a Happy Marriage 7

and when he paused to make an observation, Marion frequently broke out impetuously with the very words that were on his lips. They were both thoughtful children, though wild enough in their romps, and an observer would have been astonished at the grave problems of life they mooted and discussed. But though they were alike in mind, they were far different from one another in temperament. The keynote of Marion's character was personal ambition, which made "to be" and "to do" the two dominant verbs in her vocabulary: of ambition, Philip had not a trace. He was also even-tempered, while she ran up and down the gamut, from wild enthusiasm to depths of woe, from fiendish temper to angelic sweetness; in will power she was by far the superior, it was sufficient for her to say she would not do a thing, and no inducement altered her; but if Philip made up his mind to act in any particular way, he was easily argued or coaxed out of it. In appearance also they differed, for Marion was upright as a dart, with brown hair and large, flashing grey eyes, and Philip was fair, with stooping shoulders and a general delicacy of contour and colouring.

In some of their long talks he told her of her unknown relations on his side of the family, of his mother who was a widow, of his many brothers and sisters, and especially of the eldest brother Archie, a veritable hero in his boyish eyes; and seeing through his rose-coloured spectacles, Marion grew to reverence Archie long before she knew him. Marion had naturally a very quick intellect and a burning thirst for knowledge, and when she knew all that her uncle could teach her, of her own free will she had lessons in the subjects that attracted her. However, such an education was necessarily desultory, and in later years she often noted bitterly in herself the absence of certain rudiments, which every well-trained high-school girl knew as a matter of course. The books

in her uncle's library were varied rather by their wideness of range than by depth of subject, but, such as they were, she had dipped into them all before she was fourteen; many of them she read aloud to Mr. Halsted, curled up on his knee with one arm round his shoulders while he smoked his pipe.

But the first joyous days of liberty and love came abruptly to an end, for the Halsteds were not a long-lived race, and Marion was only fourteen when her uncle died. Her mind was almost unhinged by the woe, and child as she was she saw her future stretching before her in an unbroken vista of gloom. Jacob Halsted's property and the greater part of his money had to pass to a male relative, but he left to the little niece who loved him all that was at his own disposal, some five or six hundred pounds a year. Though nominally forced to have guardians, she was practically her own mistress, and she justified her uncle's faith in her by showing herself quite as capable of arranging her own life as many men twice her age. This was after the first numbing effects of grief had passed away. She elected to live with Mrs. Denver, Philip's mother, and for the next half-dozen years she applied herself to make good the deficiencies in her education. She worked as earnestly as if the whip of necessity for earning her own bread were held over her, and the lessons which had been begun rather as a sedative to an aching heart, became to the girl who had in her the sharp hunger for knowledge, which grows by what it feeds on, a real interest, an integral part of life. During these years she saw very little of Philip, who was first occupied with the difficulties of getting into the army, and, when they were surmounted, with the duties of his position in a line regiment. The remainder of Mrs. Denver's sons and daughters gradually married or settled elsewhere, and at last the home was altogether broken up, and the widow herself went to live with a married son,

## A Sound Basis for a Happy Marriage 9

This necessitated Marion's looking out for a new home, and after some consideration she chose to go to some relations of her father's, the Beresfords, who lived in North Miningshire; perhaps she foresaw that the comparatively slight tie of her relationship to them would give her more freedom than if she lived with any nearer kin. Thus it came to pass that until her twenty-sixth year North Miningshire was nominally her home, though really she spent half the year in London or abroad under the chaperonage of her mother's sister, Miss Denver, a kindly and somewhat masculine lady of middle age, who accepted resignedly a duty for which Providence had clearly not fitted her.

During these six years Marion published a novel which met with a cordial reception, and this so much encouraged her that she decided to devote herself altogether to a literary life, charming in itself, and particularly suitable to her lonely position, in that it dispensed with the need of chaperonage; so she took a house in London and definitely settled there to begin a new phase of life entirely alone.

As Stevenson has said, "it is in moments of effort that we learn to do the easy things that people like," and the book which had seemed to the public so spontaneous in its freshness and sincerity had cost its author many weary struggles. On looking back it seemed to Marion that her whole life since her uncle's death had been one long training for that book—all that she had learned in the six years of steady work at the Denvers, in the six years of alternate thought in quiet Miningshire, and experience of men and things in London and abroad, had been used in its gradual construction, and she could not conceive it possible that she could ever write a second novel. Twelve years of further life could not bring about a like result, for during the first twelve the impressions of life had been sown on a virgin soil; now nothing was new to her and



to garner again on the same soil was to exhaust it to no purpose.

But yet by merely lying fallow the ground recovered itself, and at the end of three years of London life Marion produced a second book, which confirmed the good impression made by the first. This one, like its predecessor, made no brilliant sensation; but it was read and commended, and paved the way for future work, and, above all, gave its author the comfortable assurance that whatever she cared to write would be well received. Having once discovered that she had no need to make an exhausting effort, but that the mere process of time would prepare the way for a third crop, Marion was content to wait patiently, and confined herself to the production of short stories and little articles for magazines; things of the nature of journalism rather than literature, but adequate to keep her pen in training and to fill up the vacancies of life lying between social duties, vacancies which would otherwise have been intolerable to a person of her mental activity.

Marion was now past her thirtieth year, she possessed independent means, a good social position, splendid health, and ability—all the good fortune of her life seemed to have reached fruition. Philip had renewed the old boy-and-girl acquaintance, for his regiment was stationed within easy distance of Town; and after the publication of the second novel, Archie also sought out his cousin whom he had known as a school-girl in his mother's house, and frequently came to see her. But it gradually dawned on Marion that the old bond of affection between the brothers was broken, when one came the other went, and as Archie's visits increased, so Philip's decreased. In vain she tried to solve the mystery, both of the men denied any cause of offence; rivalry it could not be, there had never been any hint of tender

## A Sound Basis for a Happy Marriage 11

feeling on Philip's part, and until to-day the possibility of the unemotional Archie's being in love would have seemed a joke. Archie's proposal had stirred Marion; the strenuous earnestness of a man who had more than any one else taken the place of her dead uncle as counsellor and adviser could not fail to affect her, and the experience of a proposal of any sort was not common. Marion had not been compelled to reject many wooers, for her income, sufficient to discourage some men, yet was not enough to attract fortune-hunters; and this combined with a manner rather more dignified than men are accustomed to in these free-and-easy days, had disheartened the few who would have liked a nearer relationship had they dared, and she had not yet come across any man who had the quality of audacity in courtship so delightful to woman, and so rarely found in the present generation.

In her books Marion had shown an intimate knowledge of the human heart, but her knowledge of the great passion of life was objective rather than subjective, or perhaps instinctive, for she had never been in love. Being of an analytical temperament, as a novelist cannot fail to be, she had recognised this incapacity in herself as a defect; at any rate it touched her sometimes with a feeling of isolation which marred the perfection of what many of her acquaintances considered an ideal life. Archie had stirred her deeply this afternoon, had roused in her that longing to be more like other women in their capacity for a blind devotion. She wondered if it would have been well to accept this cousin, upon whose sterling worth she could rely. She was not stony-hearted; love might grow. Was she after all grasping at a shadow and letting the substance fall? She thought of the matter in all its aspects while she remained in the same position in which he had left her, until her maid Clemence came to

seek her, and remind her that it was time to dress for dinner.

There were society engagements every evening of one sort or another now in the month of November, and to-night Marion was due at a dinner to be followed by a drawing-room meeting with an address on homes for lads working in the streets, which promised a change from the after-dinner small talk or mild music which was not unattractive.

## CHAPTER II.

### *THE INFALLIBILITY OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS.*

"A man of such a genial mood  
The heart of all things he embraced."

LONGFELLOW.

MR. PIERSON, who took Marion Halsted down to dinner that evening, was not altogether an ordinary specimen of manhood, and she felt at once that he would fill at least a page of that commonplace book wherein persons, thoughts, and things, formed the pemmican for an ultimate novel. His perfect silence first arrested her attention; he made no remark on being introduced to her, and she, to whom the vice of dumbness could not usually be imputed, kept silence also out of sheer curiosity, to see how long it would be before he deigned to speak. Meantime she studied him unobtrusively. He was a man of about fifty, who gave an impression of massive strength, not very tall, but broad-shouldered and rather ponderous, with a smooth face and small shrewd grey eyes full of genuine kindliness. It was the face of a giant, serene in the knowledge of his own power, and quietly tolerant of the weakness of others, and in the forehead and clever eyes one could read a refutation of any hypothesis that the silence had its root in stupidity. By the time that the first course was half over, Marion realised that there must be thoughts worth hearing in that brain, and that she was allowing her opportunity to slip from a kind of

obstinacy, therefore she immediately opened fire with an obvious question, "Are you interested in Mrs. Cameron's drawing-room meeting?" It was perhaps but one degree removed from the banality of the weather, but it was impossible to scale the heights of an abstract heaven in one leap.

"Yes," he answered laconically, and she felt that in the one second that his eyes had rested upon her he had summed her up as completely as she had summed him up in the previous ten minutes.

"Are you one of the speakers?" she continued, feeling that to relapse into silence on account of the meagreness of a monosyllable would be abject.

He seemed to wake up. "I am the principal speaker," he said. "Haven't you seen a printed notice? I have one somewhere—ah, I left it in my coat pocket." He spoke slowly, and rising suddenly left the table, without apology, leaving his companion bewildered with a sudden fear that she had offended him mortally and that he had departed in wrath. In that case surely it would have been but fair for her hostess to have given her warning of his eccentric temper.

There had been a momentary lull in the conversation of the other guests, who, while considering themselves emancipated in larger matters, were still tightly bound by small social conventions, and then the buzz continued in treble volume, to conceal the betrayal of awkwardness.

"There it is," said Mr. Pierson, laying the paper on the table by Marion as he returned, and reseating himself, quite unconscious of the commission of any solecism. "Stephen Pierson, that's my name," and he laid an enormous forefinger on the type. "Are you interested in the boys?"

Marion studied the paper; it told her what she knew before, that the subject of the evening was to be the feasibility of homes for the lads who worked

## The Infallibility of First Impressions 15

in the streets, and before she made any remark he spoke again, answering his own question.

"I am," he said. "I was a lad once myself, you see, and I've got him still inside me."

She glanced up quickly, and meeting his kindly humorous eyes felt strangely at her ease with him.

"What is your special part in the work?" she asked.

"I have the funds," he replied, thoroughly warmed to his subject; "but money won't do everything. It's real refined women that I want, women who will act like mothers to the lads, but be far more helpful to them than their own mothers, who are inevitably worn down by work and hardship. Women like you, who are alive and vital, who can show sympathy, and distinguish between the boys individually. My plan is to found a series of houses where, for a nominal payment, ten or a dozen lads may live—a dozen at the outside; if we have more it at once becomes a barracks—and in each house I want to have one woman as head-mother. There would be no menial work, you understand, only general supervision; she would have to give up her life to it, to develop each character separately, to help those who had it in them to rise in their true direction."

"A woman's life is such a small thing," Marion said provokingly.

She was untouched by his enthusiasm, for she had been looking at the matter from a diametrically opposite standpoint to his. She smiled to think how confused he would be did he know that he had been suggesting to one of the known authoresses of the day, whose work influenced thousands, that she should devote her life to a dozen little ragamuffins, and her smile was the outward sign of her anticipation of his abject apologies when he should discover his mistake.

"Of course a married woman could not leave her

sphere of influence," he said ; " but you are unattached, is it not so ? And you can't have very much to do ; I judge you, to be well off."

" Fairly," she answered, when she realised that he really had said that.

" You are full of life also," he continued. " So many women are dead, or at the best galvanised automata. Don't you find it so ? Look round this table—I suppose you know all of these people—which of them are alive ? "

Certainly he had no lack of conversation when he once began to speak.

" Our hostess, Mrs. Cameron, is alive," said Marion, " or at least she thinks so."

Mrs. Cameron was an untidy, dark little woman, whose curious delusion was to imagine herself keenly and extraordinarily different from any one else. She was a commonplace little person, in mind and body, who would not have been picked out even from a group of three, but she had an altogether disproportionate sense of that individuality which is our common heritage.

" Yes." He smiled.

" I know what makes some people more alive than others," said Marion suddenly. " It is self-consciousness, or—to put it better, for that phrase has become specialised—consciousness of self."

" You are mistaking effect for cause. We are conscious of self because we have an overwhelming vitality, a hungry passion for analysis. We dissect ourselves because of the throb of a pulsating life always seeking to know and probe."

" Yes, yes ; and is it good or bad ? " she asked, as if he were inspired and his answer must be final.

" It was Turgot who said, ' The assertion of individuality is the cause of the greatest amount of friction in the world,' or something equivalent. If it produces this, the vitality that you speak of is certainly harmful,

## The Infallibility of First Impressions 17

but if it leads to increased sympathy and comprehension of the standpoint of others, nothing can be better. It is rare for any one to take the trouble to judge the motive of an antagonist. We don't take time. We answer a criticism of our actions in the fraction of a second ; how can we realise the critic's standpoint ? ”

“ There is intuition.”

“ Intuition in the highest degree is a divine gift. Some people have it, and it accounts for their extraordinary personal fascination ; from them a nod or a hand-shake in a crowded room conveys more than a volume of words from another. The first time we meet them we feel that they are intimately acquainted with us, we know that they will never forget anything about us.”

Her own sensations in regard to him could not have been more concisely presented, but as it was impossible to say so, she remained silent.

Then quite suddenly and irrelevantly, he asked, “ Where do you live ? ”

“ Lexham Gardens, Cromwell Road.”

“ I sometimes walk past there ; I will come to see you,” he said.

“ I shall be very glad, but—you don't expect me to devote my life to street arabs, do you ? If there were half a dozen of me one of them might take up that line, but my one life is settled in its own groove ; there are other things more important.”

“ I certainly didn't expect you to turn your life into a new channel in the course of one conversation,” he said, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, “ or you would be a very plastic person, and hardly suitable for the work that I have at heart. But you are just one of the ladies whom I hope to influence by coming here to-night, so that perhaps at some future time——”

“ Never,” she said, with emphasis.

He only smiled indulgently, and the smile irritated



her, it seemed to convey an imputation of childishness.

In the course of the evening she was conscious of several fruitless attempts to sum him up and label him. He spoke like a cultivated man, and she had gathered from his further conversation at the dinner-table that he had been at the University of Cambridge; and yet she knew instinctively that he was not of her own social rank, and the incongruity worried her. During the course of the meeting she made many vague surmises, and at length rested on the conclusion, that in mental force and self-contained power he was of the very highest rank, and that therefore his origin was of no consequence.

The meeting lasted some time, and it was nearly midnight before Marion arrived home; she found Clemence waiting for her. "Poor Clemence!" she said, "you look so tired. I forgot your neuralgia; I might have told you to go to bed, for I could have undressed myself to-night. However, as you are here, please put out my bicycling costume; I am going for a spin."

Clemence was a gentle, refined girl, devoted to her young mistress, and quite accustomed to her vagaries, which indeed she regarded with a kind of awed admiration as betokening originality and energy far beyond what was common.

She helped to change the dainty dinner dress and arrange the neat cycling costume, and finally lit the lamp on the machine which stood in the hall.

"Don't wait," said Marion. "I shall probably be out for a couple of hours and will put myself to bed when I come in."

It was the end of November, a still, clear night, with a touch of frost in the air that made the surface of the roads dry and clean.

"Freedom! Freedom!" said Marion as she spun eastward up the Cromwell Road. "What a blessed

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thing it is, and how it does help one to live one's life. Now I suppose if I married Archie I couldn't do this, and yet this afternoon it seemed possible that I might do so. No, I like Archie, I want to keep him as a friend, but I mustn't marry him. How my thoughts dance! I think, think, think every minute of the day, and it's all conscious thought—that's what wears one's tissues so. Before this blissful era I should never have been able to go out to a dinner-party unchaperoned, I suppose, or at all events some people would have been shocked; and as for taking exercise on a bicycle in London at midnight—no, a restless throbbing head, mitigated by doses of sal-volatile, would be all that I could expect from an excitable brain like mine, and in consequence a weary day to-morrow."

When she arrived at Hyde Park Corner she turned down Grosvenor Place in order to avoid Piccadilly, and presently ran along the smooth asphalt of Victoria Street with a keen sense of enjoyment. The necessity for keeping a sharp look-out stilled the too great turbulence of her thought, but did not hinder its undercurrent.

"A big, kind philanthropist," she thought, as her mind recurred to Mr. Pierson. "Of great ability, but great simplicity too. What he told me of his life was all so simple. Fancy living out at Putney so that he could have a garden, and getting up early every morning in order to dig in it! I suppose he's a wealthy man too. Founding boys' homes in London doesn't cost nothing, and though he dreams of their being self-supporting eventually, the initial expenses will be enormous; and he didn't beg. I fancy he is bearing all the cost himself. I should imagine his to be a placid, simple life, full of good works and quiet pleasures. How different from mine, and from all my many-coloured schemes and plans."

The western towers of the Abbey were lost in

gloom, but in the open square at Westminster with its ancient aroma of sanctuary, the yellow lamps shone in all degrees and at all heights, suggesting a bewildering dance, solemnly over-looked by the majestic light of the high clock tower.

Marion turned on to the Embankment, where hansoms were still running, though the bulk of the traffic was over. London, needing, like a strong man in the prime of life, but a few hours' repose before stirring once more to active life, was settling down for the short night's rest. The tide in the river was very high, and lapped against the granite embankment, and the chains of yellow lights on the bridges, reflected piecemeal in the glittering mosaic of the water, were matched by the illuminated windows of the mighty hotels. Cleopatra's Needle rose bluntly into an indefinite gloom, and beyond it the arch of Waterloo Bridge cast an opaque shadow which gave the solitary cyclist a momentary thrill in anticipation of possible horrors lurking in those mysterious depths. Yet the whirring wheels carried her through the patch of darkness safely, and brought her out on the other side, where the vaults of Somerset House rose in Egyptian solidity; beyond them were more buildings and the Temple Gardens, and finally the open space at Blackfrairs, reputed to be in the daytime the most dangerous spot in London, but now totally deserted. In Queen Victoria Street Marion passed a stolid policeman who, accustomed to the vagaries of her generation, would not have been greatly moved had a woman flown by on wings instead of wheels.

Then she pressed onward to the Bank, the spot where seven roads met, the great heart of the City of London, which differs from the heart of man in that as night draws on the beat grows feebler, and the streams pour from the ramifying arteries more spasmodically, until at the very darkest hour they cease

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altogether. Only when the dawn grows light do they begin again, and, gathering force and volume apace, at midday form a choking torrent, which, as it rages this way and that, threatens to throttle the City or kill it with apoplexy.

When Marion glided into the broad space the life-blood had not altogether ceased to flow, a couple of omnibuses were still standing before the Mansion House to gather up the few belated passengers, and a hansom cab rattled by.

The silence of the City by night has a fascination all its own. Marion knew the scene well, for it was not the first time she had taken a midnight ramble in the City. She turned down King William Street, and ran round the immense solidity of King William's statue; a sharp turn to the left brought her into Gracechurch Street, she passed through Bishopsgate Within to London Wall, and so to Moorgate Street and back to the Bank, and then by way of Cheapside and Newgate Street to Holborn. Holborn lay before her in smooth expanse, in exact similitude of a frost-bound river. The surface asphalte, polished by much friction, was a sheet of ice, in which were reflected the street lamps; the towering buildings on either side were the precipitous banks, through which this mighty stream had carved its way in the course of ages. Straight on the cyclist flew, panting a little, over this splendid course; High Holborn and New Oxford Street unrolled in misty moving panorama beneath her noiseless wheels. Through the Circus she passed into Oxford Street, where the uneven levels made themselves felt, and at the top by a sharp turn she ran into the comparative obscurity of Park Lane, and so home by the way she had come; and to bed, to sleep the sleep of an infant amid her frilled pillows.

In the morning Clemence appeared to ask what time she should bring up breakfast. Marion was annoyed at being disturbed, and spoke sharply.

"Well, you may bring it now, as you have woke me," she said crossly.

"Please, miss, Mrs. Dyson's little girl is crying because she didn't see you all yesterday ; may she come up ?"

Marion nodded, nestling down in bed more comfortably.

Mrs. Dyson was the cook, a dour north-country woman, a widow, who had come south with her mistress from North Miningshire, and her child, a little thing of four, lived in the house by Marion's express permission. Two minutes later it fumbled at the door and came in. It was a strange-looking child, with a quantity of thick rich red hair, which over-hung a large face, the face was pale, but brightened by eyes of brown liquid jet.

"Come and talk to me, Lu," said Marion. "What have you been doing? I haven't seen you for quite a long time."

Lu took her finger out of her mouth, and with the eyes of an inspired prophetess gabbled an interminable sentence.

"I can't hear all that," said Marion, gently drawing her nearer. "Say it again."

"Mother's gone and drowned the kitten what the white cat laid in a bucket with a flower-pot atop of it and Bobby's throwed her shoes on the fire and he's got smacked."

(Bobby was the son of a groom in a neighbouring mews, an occasional playfellow of Lu's.) The child uttered the sentence this time with slow distinctness, shouting each word and laying especial emphasis on the unimportant connecting links.

"Oh, what a tragedy! And what did you do?" asked Marion, laughing.

Lu pointed with a still wet finger. "I'd like that," she said.

Marion's hand went to her neck, where she found a

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chain of clear-set amethysts, which she had forgotten to remove after dinner and had worn under her cycling dress. She unsnapped the clasp and wound the chain round Lu's fat little wrist. "Bless you, ducky," she said. "Come and give me a kiss."

Lu complied, but kept her eyes fixed on the shining stones.

"May I keep them?" she asked soberly.

"No, dear, they aren't for you, and I'm afraid you'll never have any like them all your life, unless you grow up exceptionally beautiful and bad, or exceptionally clever. You will have to make the puddings and pies, little Lu, for other people to eat."

At this point the breakfast tray suggested an adjournment.

Marion lay in bed in complete self-indulgence until midday, when a note was brought to her from Archie saying that he was coming for lunch at one o'clock; and on receipt of it she rose and put on a most becoming frock, for in her strange composite nature love of dress was strongly developed, and went down just as he arrived.

"I have to go away on business for a week or a fortnight," he said, as though nothing of yesterday's date had occurred to disturb the existing harmony of their intercourse, "so I thought I would look you up to say good-bye."

"I shall miss you; I wish I could go too," she said, oblivious of the presence of the waiting maid.

"Well, that's impossible," said Archie; and as the maid left them, and he helped himself to cutlets a second time, he added, "unless you enter into that little arrangement I suggested yesterday."

"I couldn't," she said gravely, leaning both elbows on the table and framing with her hands a face that could have fairly been called beautiful in its splendid vitality and intelligence.

"No, I don't want anything to eat, thanks; I had

breakfast a very short time ago." Then suddenly she added, "I went for a bicycle ride round the City at midnight."

"Why can't you go bicycling in the daytime like a sensible woman?"

"Because I am not a sensible woman, but something very much more—or less. Archie, do you know a man called Pierson?"

"I know a man of that name."

"This one's big and old and a philanthropist."

"My Pierson's big, that is to say breadthways, but he's not a philanthropist to my knowledge, and he's not very much older than I am. He is by way of being a millionaire, and a sporting man—at least I've seen his name at race meetings and that sort of thing."

"Oh!"

"Where did you meet him?—your man?"

"At dinner at the Camerons last night. He was speaking about homes for working lads."

"It may be the same. He was a worker himself once, a pit lad or something like that. Now I think of it, I believe he does go in for ostentatious charity."

"Do you know him by sight?"

"Yes, I've seen him at the club."

"Well, describe him."

He made a brief inventory.

"Why, of course, he's the same! How odd! I should never have thought he was that kind of man."

"Oh, he enjoys life like any one else, has odd notions though, lives at Putney instead of in Park Lane."

"Why didn't you say that at first? Is he really a millionaire?"

"That's a way of speaking, but he's made his pile though it mayn't amount to a round million."

"Is he married?"

"No, there's a sister who lives with him, I believe, but I really don't know much about him."

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"How did he make his money?"

"He invented some sort of a safety cage for a pit shaft when he was little more than a lad, but he is an extraordinarily clever fellow; he's one of the biggest coalowners in the kingdom now."

"Oh," said Marion suddenly, "is he *that* Pierson? Why, of course, I've often heard his name in the north, but I never listened to what was said about him, because it didn't interest me! When I met him last night I imagined him to be a dear, mild old father confessor sort of man."

"Humph, not that! Take care, Marion, there are stories about him."

"I'm not afraid."

"No, that's just it; you're altogether without fear."

"But not altogether *sans reproche*?" she retorted, making a highly nutritious lunch off celery alone.

When Archie had gone she pondered much over what he had said. She could not recall anything she had heard about Mr. Pierson in the north, at any rate anything discreditable; but then, as she had not known him it was probable that any facts in regard to his career might well have fallen on deaf ears. She made a mental note to ask questions about him the next time she paid a visit to her cousins the Beresfords in the north country.



### CHAPTER III.

#### "*STONY BROKE.*"

"A man without money is a man without care."

"I'M broke, Marion, absolutely stony broke."

"You've said that so often——"

"That you fancy it's a cry of 'wolf'? No, I've sent in my papers this time, and shall have to earn my living as a bank clerk or bus conductor—both, by the way, initialled B. C."

"You aren't nearly respectable enough for the former, and are much too tall for the latter," she suggested.

Philip Denver looked down at his own legs and sighed; he was well over six feet in height, his military training had obliterated the stooping shoulders of boyhood, and his delicacy seemed to have passed away.

In spite of a rather too predominant nose he was a handsome fellow.

"It's not betting nor backing other fellows' bills, but simply the ordinary necessities of life—necessaries, that is, if one has to live up to one's idea of a gentleman," he added after a moment's reflection.

"Can't Archie do something?"

"You know that the old man and I are not on speaking terms, haven't been so for years."

"I can't imagine why. You make me the sufferer; you never come to see me now."

"Might meet him here, that would be decidedly embarrassing; embarrassing things are the next worst to unpleasant ones."

"Don't talk nonsense; well, there are your other brothers."

"You might just as well say the mater, and you know how much she could do. No, they're none of them so well off as to make it a pleasure for them to pay my debts, besides, I've had my share, I can't whine."

"You'll have some tea, and stay on for dinner," said Marion.

"I will, if I'm not in the way. You'll excuse these clothes?"

"Why, of course. Tell me, Philip, how old are you?"

"Thirty-five."

"Must you really leave the army?"

"It is *must* this time. I'm dunned to death. Can't get things on credit, can't repay the other fellows' hospitality—it's a life to make a man lose all self-respect. I've shirked and shirked, but now it's really come off."

"But what will you do?"

"Oh, there are many openings for an able-bodied man," he said jocularly. "The police force, for instance, but I expect I'm too old for that. You know most things, do you know what the age limit is?"

"Oh, don't! It's too horrible! A way must be found. You, with your good wines and excellent dinners, with your Bond Street tailor, and your boots at three guineas the pair! Philip, to throw up the army is suicidal. Why doesn't Uncle Paul die and leave you his money—or stay, there is Aunt Augusta, can't she help?"

"She is far too deeply immersed in teaching the postmen to play spellicans to pay her scapegrace nephew's debts," he said, smiling.

"If it were only temporary, or if a little would set you straight—— My dear Philip, I don't suppose you have any money with you now?"

"I've learnt to do without ready money," he answered gravely.

"What nonsense! And what's a tenner between cousins?" She hastily opened a drawer in her bureau, and pulled out two five-pound notes. "It's just pocket-money for the next week," she said.

"My dear girl, I haven't sunk so low as that," he exclaimed quickly.

"So low as what? You insult me!" she cried, as she waved the notes before him, with her eager face all aglow.

"As to take a girl's money, especially when a good deal of it is of her own earning. By Jove, I wish I had your brains, Miriam," he said, using a pet name of his own invention retained from childhood's days.

"Oh, please, Philip, do take it. If I were a man you would, why do you deny me merely because I am a woman?"

He smiled and put her hands down, holding them by the wrists. "It's of no use, Miriam, I shall have to go more under before I come to that."

"But I would take it from you, if our positions were reversed, I would indeed."

He shook his head with a motion that she knew was final, and she threw the rejected notes on the table.

"Philip, you must marry an heiress."

"Easier said than done."

"But there are plenty of girls with money. I know several, and without making him too conceited, he's not a bad-looking fellow. Besides, any man can win any girl if he sets about it properly, always provided she has not already given away her heart."

"The only woman you know intimately is yourself, Miriam, does this apply to you?"

"Me? No. But I am not like other women."

It was the answer he had expected, and he laughed.

"That's not fair, Philip," she said, laughing also.

"You lay traps and I fall straight into them."

"Well, the statement was true enough, though you 'said it as shouldn't,' " he answered. "But, seriously, I can't marry; any woman would bore me to death in a fortnight. Dulness is an unpardonable fault in a woman, and yet there are so many dull good self-sacrificing wives."

"If you had said that twenty, or even ten, years ago, it might have been true; now the difficulty is to find a specimen of that type. Girls are ruthlessly individual, eccentricity is the god of the youthful."

"At any rate, women become dull directly they are in love; the most eccentrically luminous of them all loses sparkle and angle directly that occurs; she grows opaque and commonplace."

"A new and original reason why I should never fall in love."

"I hope to Heaven I never see it!" he ejaculated fervently.

Marion laughed as she left him to don a tea-gown for the dinner *à deux*. When she returned a maid followed her into the room.

"If you please, miss," she said mysteriously, "there's a gentleman in the hall—Mr. Pierson—but he won't come up if you're just going to have dinner."

Marion glanced at the clock and saw that it was not much after seven. "He can come up," she said. "Don't take dinner in until I ring." "You are not starving, Philip," she added, as the maid left the room.

He assured her on that point, and asked a question about the visitor with his eyebrows.

Marion was musing on the extraordinary hour her new acquaintance had chosen for a first call, but she

was not too much absorbed to notice the silent interrogation. "Pierson, millionaire, character, worth meeting," she murmured, and a minute later the man himself entered.

"You will turn me out if I am intruding unwarrantably, Miss Halsted?" he said. "I know it is late, but I particularly wanted to see you, and I have only just left the City."

"You are not intruding at all," Marion answered graciously, introducing him to Captain Denver. "Will you have some tea?"

"No thanks, I very rarely take tea; besides, I am going straight home to dinner. I imagine I am fortunate to find you in."

"I am generally out five nights in the week," she said, smiling; yet it occurred to her that she had never told him the number of the house, which he must have discovered for himself. He was unconventional certainly to the verge of oddity. She remembered Archie's words, and on the whole she was glad that Philip happened to be with her.

"What I came to say was that I have found out who you are and what you do," he continued.

Her heart suddenly warmed to him. Away with suspicion! He was a perfectly natural man who broke through the ties of convention as if they were spider webs, and he was therefore misunderstood by the multitude.

"I have read your books since I saw you. There are only two, are there not? 'The Jester,' and 'Discretion.'"

"Yes. It is very good of you," she said. "One's friends remember to ask for them at Mudie's, one's enemies claim acquaintance with the writer if they hear them praised."

"It must have seemed very humorous to you the other night when I suggested that you should devote your life to a squalid set of youngsters. I saw you

smile and I determined to find out what underlay that smile."

Marion blushed hotly, and murmured an ashamed denial.

"Why not?" he asked with a glint of fun in his eyes. "The notion amuses me too now. Fancy your looking after a dozen little rascals!"

"Bless them!" she said suddenly; "there might be a genius among them, an Edison or a Newton."

"But it occurred to me when I knew you were an author," he continued, persistently following his own train of thought, "that you are in a grand school for the cultivation of that intuition which we agreed to regard as divine."

Marion delighted in abstract conversation and was always ready to plunge into it on the shortest warning. She responded instantly: "But one must have intuition in some small degree first as a basis."

"Yes, otherwise you would not have begun to write fiction; other people's lives would not have interested you."

"That is so."

"And the style," he continued, "is that a matter of intuition also?"

"Style is individual, and cannot be wholly learned, but yet it may be developed and trained. There are two sorts of style, I always think, and every writer belongs by nature to one school or the other. In one the music of words is everything—words are chosen for their euphony rather than their suitability, and those with jarring consonants are sternly rejected; in the other they are selected to fit the meaning without regard to their sound, and even the crime of tautology is overlooked if thereby the best meaning is secured."

"It would puzzle me to say which——" he began.

"Sense comes before sound with me," she interpolated quickly.

"Take care of the sounds and the sense will take care of itself," Philip quoted; and, receiving a rebuking look from Marion for his frivolity, he added, "you write to the point; that is the modern style, and it's good enough for me. How any one ever waded through the long-winded tales of our fathers' time is amazing."

"I don't myself," said Mr. Pierson slowly, disregarding the interruption, "care for a highly polished style, it is too slippery, one gets no grip on it; one runs along lulled by the rise and fall as by the drone of an intoning clergyman; the very harmony of the words stifles thought."

"I met a man at dinner the other night," said Marion; "I won't mention names, but if you have been in that sacred ring of self-consecrated deities, the minor writers, you will recognise the original without difficulty. He said to me, 'My theory, Miss Halsted, is, Sound before sense; in those three words lies the germ of a magnificent revelation of which I am the prophet, crying to the public. In "Rainbow Light," my latest little work, I have carried this principle to its utmost limit. I have chosen my phrases as a fairy might choose honey, and I have linked them together with threads of fine gold.' I felt very much inclined to answer in the boldest language I could command, 'I'm afraid that must have made rather a sticky mess,' but he gave me no time for comment; he went on: 'For years poets and authors have been struggling blindly with this Frankenstein's monster of sense—Frankenstein because it is of their own creation. It is pitiful to one of clearer vision to look on at this heart-rending struggle. As for me, I wait the consummation of my life's work in perfect surety; the time will come when all the world will cry to me as to a deliverer.'"

"I know whom you mean," said Philip. "I bought one of that fellow's books—it was called 'Songs without Sense'—and I picked it up at a bookstall

thinking it was a kind of 'Hunting of the Snark' business, but I couldn't make head or tail of it."

Mr. Pierson's eyes twinkled. "One can imagine a purgatory where a man of that type might be punished by being compelled to ask for all he wants in the language in which he writes," he said.

But Marion remained grave. "Individuality of thought comes first—it is the body," she said, "and then the words, which are the dress; and in the perfection of both, without extravagance, we should have the ideal writer. But that's as impossible as the vision of one's ideal self somewhere hidden in God's great storehouse."

"Why impossible? I take it God's great storehouse is space itself, and through the vista of the ages one may spin into contact with one's own highest ego, even though one is only conscious of it as a breath of inspiration."

"Perhaps one does sometimes, and feels it as a faint enveloping spirituality in which all things are possible," said Marion gravely.

When the visitor had gone Marion turned to her cousin, and, without speaking, asked a question with her eyebrows. Philip laughed in answer a little uneasily. "He is clever," he said. "Very, very clever, there's no doubt at all about that, but I don't trust him. I've seen him somewhere, or heard something to his discredit. One doesn't find in a man of the world that crude sincerity which belongs to a boy of sixteen; I can't swallow it."

"But no man could feign an interest in things to the extent of thinking original thoughts on the subject."

"I admit he would have to be an exceptionally clever fellow."

"Do you remember our old childish word 'Kianty,' that we used to express conversation on abstract things, not personal matters or facts?"



He nodded.

"Mr. Pierson attracts me because he is so full of Kianty ; no one can be with him ten minutes without plunging into subjects below the surface."

They went down to dinner together, both rather thoughtful, but Marion soon threw off the serious mood.

"Ah," she exclaimed suddenly, "I knew I had something against you. How dare you say I knew no woman intimately except myself?"

"There is a distinct preference for the male sex," he asserted.

"I admit," she said, "that the average man has more sense than the average woman, though it is no credit to him, for it is simply by reason of his training ; but a really nice woman is ever so much nicer than a really nice man—no, I won't say that either—equally nice, is better ; but then, you see, Philip, it's so much easier to talk to men."

"Am I allowed to have an opinion of my own? Oh yes, all right, sometimes you won't let me, you know. Well, I differ very strongly from that last part of the proposition. Think of all the delicious egotistical confidences one can pour out to charming woman secure of sympathy and comfort ; begin even the half to your dearest male chum and he remembers an important non-existent engagement."

"Humph! we all know what those confidences amount to ; it is the absence of veiled flirtation that takes the sparkle out of them in the case of the man. However, we have gone far from the point. What I was going to say at the beginning was, that I have quite as many intimate women friends as men friends."

"Aunt Augusta?" he suggested in derision.

"Yes, really. There is nothing to laugh at, she is one of my real friends, as you and Archie are."

"I mentioned her as the only woman I knew you to be intimate with."

"There is Gwen Seaton. She is coming to stay with me for the Christmas holidays. That friendship has grown with years ; we attended the same classes at Winchester. She was cleverer than I, though a little bit younger ; she won everything that was to be won, and now she slaves in a high school for bread and butter, and I do just as I like. It isn't fair, is it?"

"You have the sort of cleverness that pays."

"It didn't pay in the old class-room days ; I could remember the theories of things, but not the facts to prove them. I wasn't meant to live by rule. I have an unalterable conviction that I am the exception to every rule ; I have found it universally acknowledged, even by policemen."

"It's only because you are fascinating," he said slowly, "and beautiful."

"I'm glad to be beautiful," said Marion without a trace of affectation, "and I like to be told so. You admire *pretty* women, Philip. I am not quite your style."

"Not quite."

"Someone little and mischievous and piquante attracts you," she continued, crumbling her bread. "Oh, by the way, you mustn't fall in love with Gwen. She's one of the nine daughters of a clergyman and has no money."

"It sounds the most likely thing I have heard yet," he said. "When does she come?"

"Not for three weeks, just before Christmas, and Aunt Augusta is coming to spend Christmas Day here too. You must promise to dine with us?"

"Thanks, perhaps it will be the first square meal for twenty-four hours."

"Don't!" she cried with a sudden stamp of her foot. "To think you may actually be in want! Yet, defiant of the conventions as I am, I can't ask you to stay here."

"You *are* a good girl, Miriam," he said affectionately. "Well, I'll come for the Christmas dinner anyhow, even if I have to meet Archie."

"Archie will be abroad; he's going on the fourteenth, he told me so; otherwise he might have had the invitation in preference to you."

"The powder in the jam; no matter, I'm grateful for the jam."

As they stood together by the fireplace in the drawing-room before he left, she looked at him appealingly. "I want you to promise me something, Philip?"

"Anything in reason."

"Will you tell me frankly all that happens to you? All that you do? And if you're very hard up you won't keep away and pretend it's all right?"

"I'll do what I can."

"That's right."

"I tell you most things, Miriam; you have a way of getting at the heart of a man."

"Confidence begets confidence," she said softly; "I tell you more than I tell any one else."

After he had gone Marion stood for a long time in a pleasant retrospect until the maid came in tentatively to see if she should put out the lamps. Marion sent her away saying she would see to them herself. Clemence was already in bed, the victim of neuralgia, so that she was keeping no one up by indulging the mood of self-gratulation which possessed her. She looked round the room, appreciating all the pretty things and soft colours, and she stretched out her arms so that the long loose sleeves of her black chiffon tea-gown fell back, and clasping her hands, she cried, in sudden joyous outburst:

"Oh, thank God for my life, I have everything, everything! Freedom, money, health, an object in life."

Presently she wandered into the adjoining room,

her study. The red glow of a fire in a prosperous old age shone on inlaid bureau and table ; there was no other light. Marion stretched herself on the hearth-rug by the fender, and rested her head against a cushion supported by her arm. Her mood had changed with startling suddenness, and she clenched her hand involuntarily.

"Oh, I am so lonely, so awfully alone," she cried. "I am starving in the midst of plenty! What is anything worth when I eat out my heart in loneliness? Little Lu dear, come and nestle into me, looking at me with your witch's eyes—no, no, even you wouldn't love me as I want to be loved, wholly, alone, first. I thought for one short moment Archie might, and I was so grateful I might almost have loved him back. A woman wants words, words. I want to be told I am loved, again and again. I hunger for it, but I know that my hunger will be eternally unsatisfied, I know that even if I attained my desire, the realisation would be but Dead Sea apples, unless I could love in return ; and I cannot love, my heart is stone."

## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE PHILANTHROPY OF AMUSEMENT.*

"How much lies in laughter, the cipher key wherewith we decipher the whole man."

CARLYLE.

ONE of London's own peculiar fogs enveloped London in its smutty folds ; in parts of the West End it was yellow, a choking, noisome yellow, where one saw "men as trees walking," dimly moving, soundless. In other parts it was white, but perfectly blinding ; it hung in the air veil-like, resembling successive folds of gauze, so that all objects far or near were obliterated, though the air deluded one by its seeming lightness. In the Strand the curious phenomenon of black darkness in the streets to the north, and comparative lightness in the streets leading to the river, was to be seen, the Strand itself forming the seam in this parti-coloured robe. Here, and in the City, the visitation was not a ground fog, as it was in the West End, but shifted and changed from moment to moment with all the phantasmagorial transformations in which the demon of the fog delighteth.

Captain Denver came out of the dimness of Paternoster Row, and stood considering for a moment in the open space before St. Paul's. A couple of days before, he had written to his aunt, Miss Denver :—

"Dear Aunt Augusta,—

I am stony broke, and have sent in my papers.

"Your precious nephew,

"PHILIP."

And the answer lay in his pocket at this moment, worded as concisely as his own note :—

“ Come to see me at Possibility Hall, N.E., any day between three and six.

“ Your Aunt,  
“ AUGUSTA.”

It was three o'clock now, and if it were to be done 'twere well done quickly, so he sprang upon an omnibus going eastward, and was landed at the Bank. He had been to see Miss Denver before and had vague notions of her locality. A vision of an apple-green bus starting from the Bank floated into his mind as a medium of transit, and by pure good luck he hit upon one of the right sort, and was carried rapidly northwards, up Bishopsgate Street into the Kingsland Road. Here he alighted, and plunged into one of the eastward turnings which he imagined he recognised. It was fortunate for him that the fog was not bewildering, only benumbing and depressing, for never did adventurer set off with slighter knowledge of his destination. He wandered vaguely on until he realised that the streets varied only between two types : the first sort was lined with costers' barrows, and formed an open-air market of the very poor ; fruit and frills hung side by side, greenish grapes, tinged with the unwholesome brown of decay, shared in the melancholy mood of yards of billowy embroidery, which could be bought in any quantity for a penny, and was curiously incongruous in its snowy whiteness with the smutty atmosphere by which it was surrounded. Philip paused to marvel how it managed to keep white, when his eyes lit on a stall beyond, and he marvelled yet again, for there was openly displayed horse flesh, in leathery heads of equine shape and masses of cuttings and strips of flesh, all of the same colour, the nauseating red-brown

of cats'-meat. The whole of the cats of Bethnal Green and Haggerston could not consume so much meat, who did then? Old clothes and crockery, unwholesome bedding and second-hand books, lay cheek by jowl, and the street reeked of the mingled odours of unwashed garments and fried fish. On the greasy pavement, tucked into the lee of a barrow, not a yard from the splashing mud of the wheels in the roadway, was a little baby with a wondering dirty face; a few paces beyond, at a fried-fish stall, its father, a thin lad, was dealing out, with a jest for each customer, parcels of his wares wrapped in greasy newspaper.

The next street was an admirable specimen of the second type of the district. Little brick boxes, looking just as if they might have been dumped down out of a cart and set up on end, lined the dreary roadway, they were built of the soul-crushing material known as earthbrick; muddy children and slatternly women formed the human element, and the sickly nauseating odour already described penetrated everywhere. At last Philip asked his way, and being directed, passed by the back of a timber-yard and down a road diversified by villainous mud holes, finally emerging opposite two gaunt stuccoed houses with a few scarecrow trees growing in a mud plot before them. So that there could be no mistake the words "Possibility Hall" ran in letters a yard long across the combined frontage. No money had been wasted on mere externals, and no one had troubled to renew the buff and maroon paint which were now fast merging into one hue—a dirty brown. These things were matters of indifference to the frequenters of Possibility Hall.

A little girl of fourteen, whose thin, sharp face was of a pronounced board-school type, opened the door to Philip. Yes, Miss Denver was in; would the gentleman come in? Was it Captain Denver? Yes. Would he then walk straight upstairs and knock at the first door on the right? Plainly no energy was

wasted superfluously in attendance at Possibility Hall. But before Philip had time to carry out these instructions or to give the child the sixpence for which he vaguely fumbled, a strong, harmonious voice hailed him from the top of the stairs, "Is that you, Philip?" then, in the tone of a commanding officer, "Tea, Alethea."

Captain Denver marched to the spot from whence the voice emanated, and discovered his aunt. Miss Denver was a strongly built, square-shouldered woman of no great height, her face was powerful both in feature and expression, and one felt that it would not have been amiss to apply to it the word "clean-shaven." Her hair was cropped to her neck, and it was obvious to the least initiated that she did not wear stays. Her black serge blouse, belted, and her short skirt were neat enough; but the absence of linen and the large square-toed shoes, down at the heel, gave her an uncomfortable aspect of "sloppiness." She shook hands with her nephew, with a grip like a man, and preceded him into her sanctum. Here there was a bright fire burning, and everything was clean but severely plain. The deal table, the chest of drawers, and one of the only two chairs the place boasted, were covered with papers. The latter Miss Denver rapidly cleared, by the simple process of piling the contents on to the boarded floor.

"Now, sit down, Philip," she said. "It isn't often you come to see me."

"I'm too modest to come unless I'm sent for."

"How's Marion, and your dear brother Archie?"

"All right."

"And your mother and the others?"

He nodded.

"Now we've done with them," she said vigorously, "and can come to the more important business—yourself. How much do you owe?"

Alethea at this juncture appeared with two thick



breakfast cups full of tea, and a plate of bread-and-butter.

"Set it down, child, set it down," said Miss Denver; which Alethea promptly did and departed.

"I thought you'd want to know that," said Philip. "It isn't much really, but I have no prospects, so these infernal tradesmen won't wait; two thousand pounds would clear me amply, and with arrangement fifteen hundred might do."

"Whew! I could build——"

"Why, my dear aunt, many a fellow——"

"Hush!" she said imperatively. "Many a fellow has committed murder, but that is no reason why I shouldn't be shocked at your cutting off a man's hand. Eh?"

"Well, I don't want you to pay it. They must go to the devil."

"And see you in the bankruptcy court, assets nil? Eh? A pretty business."

She strode up and down the bare boards with her slippers shuffling. He drank some tea and helped himself to bread-and-butter.

"Have you actually left the army?"

He nodded. "It's all U P now."

"Then I suppose you haven't a penny to bless yourself with."

He produced three sovereigns and about half-a-crown in silver.

"Just been to the office of a sporting paper that had a little thing of mine in last July, and got this out of them," he said.

"Then supposing your debts are paid, what do you propose to do?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Get along somehow. Apply for the post of assistant manager here, perhaps."

She snorted contemptuously. "The assistant managership is undertaken gratuitously," she said. "We all work for love, but you can't live on it."

"Unless the loved one is an heiress," he suggested.

"Have you seen your Uncle Paul?"

"No, and don't want to," he replied promptly, in the tone of a naughty boy.

"He's coming here to-night."

"Then I'll clear out."

"No you won't. He's your own uncle and though he's my brother I can make him do anything in the world I want."

"And what do you propose to make him do?"

"Pay your debts."

"Poor beggar! Well, I wouldn't mind seeing the fun, if I might be hidden somewhere," and he looked vaguely round at the bare walls.

Miss Denver seized her teacup and flourished it as she walked, while Philip watched in breathless excitement. It reminded him of the thrilling feats of school days when he had swung a canful of liquid round his head without spilling a drop. "Ten to one on the cup," he murmured; but she paused and drank half the contents, which considerably reduced the odds.

"If your uncle will give you £1,000, I will find the rest," she announced suddenly.

"That's awfully good of you," he said, rather shamefacedly.

"My money, as you know, goes to brighten the lives of the poor who can't help themselves; but in this case, if I don't give it to you, it is not you who will suffer, but the tradespeople who have supplied goods on the credit of a Denver, so you shall have it."

"You are a real good sort," said Philip, but she wheeled round upon him so suddenly that some of the tea was spilt on her dress. "Cup wins," he muttered, as he stooped to wipe it off with his handkerchief.

"No matter," she said indifferently. "Now, seriously, what are you going to do for a living?"

"I have an idea. I thought perhaps Uncle William would find a place for me on his farm at Cape Town."

"But he will be in England in a couple of months; if you go out now you will just cross him."

"Will he? I wish I had known that before. However, it's done now and it can't be helped."

"Well, what are you going to do in the meantime?"

"I'll manage somehow."

She knitted her brows. "Your Uncle Paul is giving a conjuring performance here to-night as part of our entertainment. It lasts from six to eight, and—gracious—I haven't done the handbills. Philip."

"Well?"

"Will you be useful?"

"Certainly."

"You will have to stay here to see him, and you might as well be employed. Could you print off some programmes for me?"

For the next weary hour Philip sat on a hard-backed chair sticking pieces of paper on to a clammy gelatine surface, pressing them down and peeling them off. He worked like a little school-boy under his mistress's supervision, for if he hesitated, the vigilant pen, running in the unshaded lamplight, paused, and a watchful eye was on him. Once Miss Denver was summoned away for ten minutes, and he stretched his back and rolled a cigarette with infinite relief, then hid it furtively beneath a pile of gummy papers. When she returned it required much screwing up of courage before he could say in the meekest of tones:

"Do you object to smoke?"

"I detest smoke," said Miss Denver sharply, and the hand, which had crept to the cigarette, dropped

again quickly. "But I did not say you mightn't," she added, after a slight pause.

"Of course I sha'n't smoke if you don't like it," he answered, a little testily.

All at once she gathered up an armful of papers. "I'm going to distribute these and see the room is ready. Finish those programmes and I'll send Alethea for them. It's six now; you can't see your uncle until it's all over."

When she had departed it occurred to Philip to accomplish his task with celerity, and go out to get some dinner, for he would not be wanted until after eight. He left a note to that effect with the completed pile of programmes, and went out into the raw cold air. Finding the neighbourhood barren of possible food, he took the first omnibus to Liverpool Street, where he had a substantial dinner in order to fortify himself against Uncle Paul.

Paul and Augusta Denver were the only two unmarried members of a numerous family, and had been left rather better endowed than the other members; he, as the eldest son, she, as the only unmarried daughter. A distinct vein of originality more or less noticeable in many of the family had cropped up in these two as eccentricity. Aunt Augusta's eccentricity, however, took a benevolent form, the form of the philanthropy of amusement. Uncle Paul's line was very different. He was a man to dry up every atom of laughter in one, for he laughed incessantly at nothing. It was not a harsh nor offensive guffaw, but a little tinkle, expressive of nothing but non-merriment, and as effective an antidote to a superabundant sense of humour as could well be imagined; it extinguished fun in other people as abruptly as the chemical bottles sold for the purpose extinguish flames. This dried-up giggle served its possessor as a weapon of defence, for with it he met all attempts at serious business,

until his baffled listener, driven to a frenzy of exasperation, fled from him without accomplishing that for which he had come. Paul's mania was for parlour tricks ; he considered himself a conjurer far surpassing Maskelyne, and in this form Augusta seized him and made use of him ; thus was his vanity gratified and her end served.

When Philip returned, Paul was in the very height of his glory, "gagging" in between his tricks and emitting at the end of every sentence his little "Hee-he-he-berr," which somehow remotely suggested that which is not in nature, the giggle of an ancient sheep.

Philip turned from him in disgust to the audience, and looked round the room with something of the spirit in which Marion would have looked at it. He felt a sudden access of veneration for his aunt, for he had hardly been prepared for the transformation scene which greeted him. Outside was a damp and cheerless atmosphere, where fog and smuts, held in solution by rain-drops, dripped from gutters and unclothed plane twigs, and as he entered he was greeted by a burst of light and cheerfulness. He could not have believed that the large bare room with its tawdry hangings of turkey red could have looked so bright. It was crammed by a dense crowd of men, women, and children, ranging from the eminently respectable small tradesman, to the waif who barely obeyed the law's mandate in regard to clothing ; and on every face shone pure enjoyment. Hunger, care, and fear, were for the moment washed away by sheer delight at the sight of rabbits coming out of a top hat and a paper garland springing from empty air. Close by the door, screwed on to a fragment of empty bench hardly large enough for one, were a little coster lad and lass ; he could not have been more than seventeen, she, perhaps, younger, but she had the peculiarly bonny little face sometimes seen in that class, a face made up of curved lines, and irradiated

by an expression of mingled coyness and roguishness. As he gazed at her Philip found it possible to realise how Emma Hamilton rose from the very lowest class to the highest, by her dominion over men's hearts. The boy had an open, pert expression, not unattractive, but his glance was singularly soft when it rested on his companion's face ; and as he looked at her rather oftener than ten times a minute, his pertness was almost continually subdued. They were very much in love, and very young. From them Philip turned again to the stage, and found nothing to venerate in the be-wigged, bandy-legged little man hopping about with exquisite appreciation of himself. It seemed intolerable to ask a favour of such a creature, it would be better to leave that job to some one else. On the spur of the moment Philip tore open an old envelope, and resting it against the doorway wrote in pencil :—

"I can't stand him. If I came into the council I should either throttle him (which wouldn't improve my prospects unless his will was in my favour), or say things which would prevent his ever doing me a kindness again. I am running away, and I leave the matter in the hands of my dear and capable aunt, who will add one to her many good deeds by standing proxy for her cowardly nephew Philip."

This he folded and gave to the trustworthy door-keeper, to be delivered to Miss Denver.

## CHAPTER V.

### COURT CARDS.

"The contradiction between her look, which was sad, and her smile, which was joyous, gave to her countenance something a little wild; which produced this effect that, at certain moments the sweet face became strange without ceasing to be charming."

VICTOR HUGO (*trans.*).

WHEN I was a child we once hit upon the gorgeous plan of eliminating from a pack all but the court cards before beginning a game of Beggar-My-Neighbour, and then played in entranced expectation of what would eventually happen. The end would have been obvious to all but such little duffers: the game came to a standstill for want of playing cards with which to pay the forfeits. To this a not unduly strained analogy may be found in the game of life. The rich and valuable court cards are those rare men and women who give colour to life, who really touch us, who constitute our own most sacred Inner Circle: they need not necessarily be court cards to any one else, but they are to us; and each of us makes up his own pack out of his circle of friends and acquaintances; yet the playing cards are necessarily superior in numbers to the court cards. Day by day we strike up against numberless twos and threes, numberless fours and fives, but we consider ourselves lucky to meet with a friend whose number is near ten, and we may be reckoned among the favoured of the earth if we happen to live with those we could rate still higher. We have no doubt, sometimes vaguely

imagined, that a life passed wholly in the society of our human court cards would be perfect, and have chafed against the restrictions which condemn us to keep apart from them ; yet if we eliminated all the playing cards what delightful confusion there would be in the world. Who could pay the forfeits of life, who could do the rough work, if all were highly sensitive, intellectual, and refined ? And even if such a state of things were possible, I doubt if the world would be the heaven that we anticipate. Imagine the mental wear and tear of an existence passed always among those whose opinions we value, and those whom we are extremely anxious to please ; it would be almost unendurable. Picture the confusion that would reign were we really desirous of exchanging opinions with every single individual at a social gathering ; the combination of interests would clash and nullify each other ; diverse feelings and sequences of thought would bubble for ever on the surface, until we should come away jaded and worn, irritated and nerve-tired ; and a repetition of such experiences might lead very likely to a lunatic asylum. No, mercifully every life has a large dilution of playing cards ! Yet the art of the novel writer is concerned only with the court cards : to attempt anything more extended would be an absurdity, involving a book tedious in the extreme and long as life itself ; to sketch in words the meetings, the introductions, the many momentarily touching circles, that never cut our own, the banal conversations we must perforce endure, would be merely idiotic ; though it must be noticed that the tendency of the present day is to exalt petty detail purely in proportion to its insignificance. A true picture of life in an extended sense a novel can never be, every artist must subordinate or vaguely indicate details not essential to the whole.

Therefore to compress into a small space a phase of life devoted wholly to playing cards, it is sufficient



to say that Marion's life for the next fortnight was passed amid scenes which never touched her inner circle ; she danced and talked and dined with greater or less vivacity, her own heart remaining in abeyance all the time. Her life, though following a certain routine, was not monotonous. In the morning she rode on horse-back in the Row, for there was a spell of mild, muggy weather, such as often comes before a hard winter, perhaps in order that the stinging cold may be received with more respect in consequence. She generally returned home to find endless details awaiting her decision, details which are the daily task of every mistress of a house, and she managed, as a rule, to get an hour at the study of Italian literature, which had been her hobby for the last year. After lunch came a romp with Lu, or a serious conversation. Then calls, or social gaiety, or shopping. The evenings were nearly always filled, and three nights a week she was at a ball ; but she had learned to love dancing in provincial ball-rooms, and could not accustom herself to the narrow confines of a London whirl, so she generally attended these functions for but a short time, to see who was there, to have a chat with one or another. She did not realise how smooth life was made for her by her popularity and reputation, for she was so much accustomed to being sought after, and treated with delicious deference by those whose conversation was at the least worth having, that she never considered there were other women of her age, neglected and solitary, who battled unceasingly to retain a little self-esteem without external reinforcement. Marion enjoyed these things after a fashion, but they had very little hold on her, and on the day she expected Gwen Seaton, she awoke with a sincerer pleasure in anticipation than any society tribute had given her ; for Gwen was one of her court cards.

Miss Seaton was, what might aptly be termed, a

scholastic girl—her whole life had been passed amid schools and colleges. She was short of stature and sturdy, she had never troubled about her waist, and her feet were solely implements for walking. Her features were irregular, yet she owned some beauty, which lay in her eyes and hair. The former were big and grey, with dark lashes—eyes that looked deep blue in some lights—and her hair was almost blue-black ; and, though it was strained tightly back from her forehead, it yet fell by its own weight in ripples, which sorely tried Gwen's patience. Her friendship for Marion had not so far prevailed as to leave one tendril loosened by deliberate intent. Gwen was clever, had deep feelings, and was sensitive ; her sensitiveness took the form of an equal shrinking from praise or blame, and an attempt to obliterate herself in a quiet mediocrity. Her reserve was mixed with an odd sincerity, which made her expand unexpectedly in certain directions. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when she arrived at Lexham Gardens, and she was immediately welcomed into the haven of Marion's own sanctum, where tea was ready. For the first half-hour the threads dropped between the friends since the last meeting were knitted up, then Marion made a gesture toward the stacks of cards which adorned her mantelpiece. "Shoals of invitations, you see," she said gaily. "You can pick what you choose, and refuse the rest. That's the best of being a literary person, it gives me such splendid liberty. If I do anything eccentric, it is, of course, that I am gathering local colour for a novel ; if, at the last moment, I choose to forego a party, I am equally, of course, enchained by a minute of inspiration. I refused everything for to-night, as I thought you would not care to go out again, but there is plenty in prospect. See, balls, one, two, three, on successive nights, the first of them on Boxing Day—that is a subscription affair, but I took

tickets, for it is in the Empress Rooms where one has space in which to turn. Do you care to go?"

"I'm fond of dancing, though I don't do it well," said Gwen, without an atom of self-consciousness. "Any way, it's good exercise."

"A girl who can calmly go to a dance because it's good exercise, deserves to have been born in a world without sentiment," said Marion severely. "What frock have you?"

"The black one I shall wear here every evening. No one will know me, so it doesn't in the least signify. What do you go to a ball for?"

"To talk to the men, of course, and to be admired."

"What men?" Gwen asked. "I never see a man, that is, anything but an ancient professor. I have forgotten what to say to a young man."

"We must have some men, of course. I don't know Philip's address, or what he is doing with himself, but he promised to dine here on Christmas Day, so we will make him come to the ball. Archie is abroad. We must have my dear boy Stanley; he's very young, but neither foolish nor insipid——"

"I detest boys."

"Stanley is two- or three-and-twenty, and such a dear. He works in a City office, but he is very well connected."

"I suppose you're very well off, Marion," said Gwen suddenly.

"I'm not rich. I have about £700 a year, but I have to dress a good deal, and it is so expensive living in London; money soon runs away."

"For everything I want I have £100," said Gwen, without bitterness.

"Poor little Gwen," said Marion, "you make me feel a brute. Do you get very sick of the grind? I wish you'd throw it up and come and live with me; you know I should like that——"

"Yes, live on charity——"

Marion shook her head in emphatic denial.

"You're very generous, Marion, but I have a little self-respect left still."

"Far too much; only, call it pride."

"Self-respect is sometimes the only thing that enables one to go on living," Gwen continued. "It is a stiff backbone."

"It's a good quality in moderation, but, for my part, I find it needs continual reinforcement from other people to keep it going."

"What you mean is merely a good conceit of yourself."

"Am I conceited, Gwen?"

Gwen, who was the living incarnation of truth, hesitated not a minute. "Yes, perhaps you are, but your common sense would prevent its ever being obtrusive."

"I suppose," said Marion dreamily, "that an absolutely conceited person would need no external reinforcement, their belief in themselves would be so deep-rooted as to require no corroboration."

"There is no god so high as to reject incense before the altar," said Gwen drily.

"I suppose I do think I'm rather nice," said Marion whimsically, "though I'm not such a fool as to believe all the nonsense the interviewers talk. I never dream that my books will stand on the bookshelves of our children's children, reprinted in penny editions for nothing, because the copyright has run out, and I don't see much use in that sort of posthumous fame either. If they live in the present, and stir living people, that's all I care for."

"It surprises me to hear you say that."

Marion faced round. "Bless you, my dear, I'm shallow enough and egotistical enough in all conscience. I'm not deep and strong like you; why, you'd work for a lifetime, living on a crust of bread, if at the end you could say, 'I have added something

to the sum of human knowledge ; I, even I, have built up one brick in the fair palace of the world's record, though no one knows it.' I don't want that ; it's nothing to me what happens when I'm dead. I'm all alive and palpitating now, and I want people to come and tell me all their heart's core, all the burning things they dare not tell to any one else, because they have read my books, and feel that I know, that I am warm and vital, and that I love humanity."

"I sometimes think, Marion," said Gwen soberly, "that you were born ages and ages ago, and with those great bright eyes of yours looked on ahead, and saw our future and ourselves, and that you are as wide and tender as if you were the mother of us all ; and again at times I feel years older than you, and look upon you as a brilliant, charming child to be humoured and caressed."

Marion laughed shrewdly. "Nothing so romantic," she said shortly. "Sometimes I am an angel and sometimes a devil, and that's all about it. But as for you, you are always the same—strong, calm, and self-contained, with radical tendencies toward good ; you struggle with unrelaxed effort in an uncongenial environment."

The dressing-bell sounded sharply, and the silence which had followed the last speech was broken by Marion's speaking in a commonplace tone. "Well, it's nice to think we have the whole evening before us, isn't it? And to-morrow too ; Sunday always fills itself. Church, morning ; Queen's or Albert Hall concert, afternoon ; men dropping in to tea——"

"I am surprised at such a conventional Sunday from such an advanced person——"

"I don't run a tilt against the conventions," said Marion, "I merely go my own way, without regarding them, and if they happen to fit in, well and good."

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Denver arrived on Monday afternoon about three o'clock.

The weather had changed abruptly, and a whirling fall of wet snowflakes, driving horizontally with a wild wind, heralded Christmas week. The roadways were clothed with liquid mud of the consistency of treacle. Here and there, where it found a congenial resting-place, such as the cold tilt of a slate roof, or the windward side of a lamp post, the snow remained snow, elsewhere it rapidly became slush. The forlorn omnibus horses struggled along with a fortitude which had its root in a conviction of the inevitableness of certain things, among them the daily journey. The drivers tried to keep the wet off their eyes by little scraps of black gauze tied veil-wise or by sopping handkerchiefs bound round the brims of their hats. It was impossible to stir without being penetrated with damp stickiness within, and a plaster of mud and snow without.

Miss Denver, having changed her wet things, was comfortably installed in a vast armchair by a fire in the study, and Marion, who had glanced out of the window, turned away with a shiver. "Ugh!" she said, "there is only one thing that strikes more utterly chill to the heart than half-melted snow drifting all ways at once, and that is the crystal slant of raindrops, falling diagonally across the hard wooden frame of a railway-carriage window."

Miss Denver sniffed.

Then her young hostess laughed suddenly.

"Now are you quite comfortable? If you want anything, Clemence is capable of fetching it. I have two notes to write, which must go by this post, though it's a witching hour for talk. I wonder what's become of Gwen?"

Silence for a moment, broken only by the scratching of her pen; then she began again.

"So you and Uncle Paul between you really paid

Philip's debts? It was good of you. I know he felt it, though he doesn't say much. You can't tell me his present address, can you? I wrote to his old rooms reminding him of his promise to come here for his Christmas dinner, a week ago, but have had no answer."

"I know nothing of his whereabouts. He said he was going to earn his own living until Uncle William landed in England. When business matters in regard to the debts have to be settled he comes to see me. The last time he turned up I told him that he could live at Possibility Hall, and make himself useful for his keep; but he said he already had a job. You young people need more than one fall to humble you."

"For young people, substitute Denvers, including those who are Denvers by blood if not by name," suggested Marion. "I wonder if Philip will turn up at Christmas. Young Stanley promised to come yesterday, and he is also going to the ball with us the night after. If Philip comes I shall want another man to make up six." After a quite perceptible pause she added, "Aunt Augusta, have you ever, in the course of philanthropy, met a Mr. Pierson?"

"Stephen Pierson? Knew him before you were born. No, not quite that, but ever since he's been known," was the unexpected rejoinder.

"He was a pitman, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but not of that extraction. His father was a gamekeeper who took to coal mining—strange transformation!"

"How much you know about him! I was wondering if I might ask him to dine here on Christmas Day; it's extraordinarily short notice, but I don't suppose that would ever occur to him. What do you think, Aunt Augusta?"

Miss Denver regarded her with a stare of surprise.

"My dear girl, you make me feel as if the world had gone back thirty years. Asking my advice!"

"Well, I don't know what sort of a man he is," said Marion, a trifle testily.

"A real good sort!"

"But I have heard stories——"

"Lies, all of 'em!"

"All right, I'll ask him." And the note was written instantly, but it was worded with a certain regard to conventionality.

"My aunt, Miss Denver, tells me that you and she are old friends, etc., etc.; very short notice—she only arrived this afternoon, etc."



## CHAPTER VI.

### A DINNER PARTY.

"Tell me a better fortune for my money."

LONGFELLOW.

A PARTY of six is a difficult one to manage ; there are too few persons for  *tête-à-têtes*  of any length, too many for general discussion. Marion was quite aware of this, but trusted to her own versatility to carry off the Christmas dinner with *éclat*. The day before she had received a wire from Philip saying he was coming, and a delighted note of acceptance from Mr. Pierson, on receipt of which she had discussed the arrangement of the table with Miss Denver, and settled the matter in the only possible way. Philip, who acted as host, must take down his aunt, she would thus be next to Mr. Pierson on Marion's right, and Gwen and Stanley need not separate.

The table was as pretty as a dainty decoration of flowers could make it, and any doubts as to the congruity of the party were dispersed before the first course was over, for Philip was in capital spirits, and Miss Denver charmed to meet an old friend, and these two alone were sufficient to ensure success. Stanley Thirsk, the greatest stranger of the party, looked more like nineteen than two-and-twenty. He was slight and boyishly graceful, with a wide thin-lipped mouth, and rather a pert nose ; yet his clear brown skin and a certain *naïveté* and distinction in his air made him irresistibly attractive.

"I know I shall kiss him some day, purely by

accident," Marion had said to Gwen before his arrival ; " and it wouldn't do, you know, because though he is such a child, he's only four lives removed from a dukedom and it might be imagined that I had designs on the aristocracy."

The dignity of being hostess suited Marion admirably, and she was seen to far more advantage than in her more frivolous moods. She was sensible of a slight strain, of a desire to appear natural, which indicated a nervousness very unusual with her, and beneath this there ran an undercurrent of speculation as to Mr. Pierson's verdict upon herself. He seemed to her to be more weighty, more worth pleasing than any man she had so far met, and the desire to look well in his eyes strung her up to concert pitch.

She distributed her conversation fairly between him and Stanley ; but once, when the other four had entered into a tense debate, she had Mr. Pierson's attention entirely to herself for a few minutes. Books were the subject of discussion, and she had instinctively expected to be able to hold her own on a theme so peculiarly her forte ; but she discovered that the breadth of his reading surpassed her own, he seemed to be strong in all those places where there were gaps in her own knowledge, and once or twice, to her chagrin, she had to confess ignorance. Considering that his life must have been made up of men and things rather than of books, she was forced on to a lower plane in her own self-esteem—an experience which was peculiarly distasteful on this particular evening ; but he presently remarked :

" I am amazed at the extent and breadth of your reading ; where have you found time for it all ? "

The remark was so much what had been in her mind in regard to him, that she glanced at him quickly, not able to resist the impression that he was speaking satirically ; yet she found no indication of satire in his open face.

"It is good of you to say so," she answered. "I feel that only in the last five minutes have I learned the depths of my ignorance, and as for time, why, what else have I to do but read? I might well retort how have you in your busy life found time?"

"But my life," he replied, smiling, "has been at least half as long again as yours."

On that basis she calculated his age to be about forty-eight.

"Forty-five," he asserted, answering her unspoken thought.

"You have given me two years' grace," she said quietly.

"Thirty to thirty-two, it is what I should have judged," he answered.

She laughed.

"You think that I should have taken half a dozen years off my estimate?"

"It is what most men would have done."

"I am always glad when I do not follow in the track of 'most men.'"

"I should think you have seldom cause for regret then. Aren't we getting delightfully personal?"

"It is much the most fascinating kind of conversation between a man and a woman."

She met his eyes and her own fell. Was there truth in that impeachment of Archie's? Mr. Pierson certainly showed some acquaintance with the game. She dismissed the subject with a commonplace.

They did not have another exclusive *tête-à-tête* until nearly the end of dinner, when some remark of his, in which the words "profound thought" occurred, caused her to exclaim, "I read somewhere the other day a sentence distinguishing between profound thought and serious reflection; it seemed to me admirable."

"You have the one," said Aunt Augusta abruptly, "but I doubt if you'll ever attain the other; it wants brains."

"Oh, come, Aunt Augusta," said Philip, in grave rebuke, "don't take us in by enunciating a well-known fact as if it were newly discovered. Why, even Alethea knows that."

"What do you know about Alethea?" she demanded sharply, turning on him.

"Don't look so shocked; we haven't been holding assignations on the mud-plot behind the plane trees. It's only a simple deduction arguing from the general principle that there's very little that young lady doesn't know."

Mr. Pierson answered Miss Denver's original remark. "Deep feeling is sufficient to ensure reflection, and Miss Denver is right—strong brain power is required for profound thought."

"I have the feeling, and not the brain," said Marion, "but it never occurred to me before in that light."

When the men found their way to the drawing-room later, Marion was seated on the sofa; she made an almost imperceptible movement, which brought Philip to her side instantly.

"I want you to come with us to a subscription dance in the Empress Rooms to-morrow night," she said. "Stanley is making one of the party. By the way, Stanley, as we are to go independently, do you mind taking charge of your ticket? It's on the mantelpiece."

"Is that a ball in aid of a charity in which Mrs. Cameron is interested?" asked Mr. Pierson. Marion signified assent, and beckoned to Stanley to hand him a circular.

Mr. Pierson did not look like a dancing man—in fact, it would never have occurred to Marion to regard him in that light—but when he had scanned the circular, he said slowly, "Yes, it is the same. I have a sheaf of half a dozen tickets for this ball; if they have not been thrown away, I must find them,

and come to-morrow. I'm very fond of dancing, though it is long since I have been in a ball-room."

"That will make the same party as to-night, excepting you, Aunt Augusta; won't you be persuaded to come? There are still two tickets over; one has to take half a dozen, if any."

"You can do very well without me," said Miss Denver sturdily. "You don't want any one to organise and set you going as my friends at Possibility Hall do. I guess, though, I know more dances than any of you; we go in for many an intricate and fantastic step, and from what I can hear ceremony has deserted you to come to us."

"I wish you would give us a few specimens of those dances," said Philip. "We might introduce them to-morrow night." But she only laughed good-humouredly at his chaff.

"Who is going to be chaperon?" Gwen asked.

"Don't you consider that I am competent?" asked Marion. "I think that 'housekeeper' and 'chaperon' ought to be synonymous terms. Parliament might bring in a Bill to that effect."

"Really it does seem rather absurd," said Philip, "that a woman must be married before she is considered a competent chaperon, when she is allowed to manage her own money matters."

"Quite so. Besides, you will be there," said Marion, reverting to the concrete. "Between us I daresay we shall be able to keep Gwen in order."

"I don't know that I can come."

"You must, Philip, you can't be at work; every one has a holiday on Boxing Day."

"What time does the affair begin?"

"Nine-thirty; but you must dine here first."

"Very well," he assented.

Marion was longing to inquire into his means, and the method of his life, but she had no opportunity for some time. Stanley sang, and she played his accom-

paniments, and then the party clamoured for some music from her. She sat down at the piano and played easily, without effort, but as her fingers wandered over the keys her thoughts were elsewhere. When she came to herself she discovered that Philip was beside her, leaning on the piano, and that the others were not near enough to hear what she said. So she allowed her fingers to run on still, while she looked into his face with her searching eyes, and asked, "What of the promise you made me?"

"It was only if I could," he answered quickly, "and it is impossible; release me unconditionally."

She bowed gently. "Of course I do not hold you, but I am very anxious. You are not starving, nor killing yourself by overwork?"

"Do I look like it?"

"No, you look very well. Give me your address, Philip; there are so many things I may want to consult you about."

He considered. "I'm afraid the address will give me away at once."

"If I drive through the street I will shut my eyes, though how I could find out what you are doing, from an address, I own I don't know."

He wrote it on the cover of a song.

"32, Combermere Road, Fulham," she read. "That tells me nothing."

She rose to join the others, and found Stanley studying Gwen's hand to foretell the future, while Mr. Pierson and Miss Denver enjoyed an earnest conversation apart.

"I am to be married," said Gwen, laughing, "and eventually a widow, but he does not find any enormous legacies or great riches in my palm."

"Before your marriage there is an unhappy love affair," said Stanley solemnly.

"It had better begin quickly then," said Gwen, "if I am to get all these things in. Thank you, you have

told me a good deal. About the character is very true. I suppose you have never yet found a girl's or woman's hand in which you have dared to see 'no marriage lines'?"

"Yes I have. But I can't believe it true myself," he answered, with a quick look at Marion.

"I'm not bashful," she responded cheerfully, in answer to the look. "It is I that he means, Gwen. See, Stanley, can't you find one to-night? Not even an indication that one may grow? Poor me!"

With the perfect naturalness which distinguished her, she knelt down by Gwen, holding out her hand. Her long skirt, with its glittering embroidery of sequins, caught the firelight, which also danced on the clear-set stones at her neck.

Stanley took the large white hand in his own, and she felt his tremble and burn. "I can't see it," he said despairingly. "Love—no marriage."

Miss Denver hitched up her chair, and bending forward with her hands on her knees, scrutinised the young faces. "Well, that's odd," she said, with her usual outspokenness; "for if ever a woman was born to be married, it's Marion."

"Have your own fortune told," Philip suggested, and Stanley, dropping Marion's hand, carried out the suggestion, while she detached herself from the group and turned to Mr. Pierson.

"One knows it cannot be true, but it feeds the egotism that is in one," she said.

"It may be true; we know enough to know that nothing is impossible," he answered. And after a slight pause he asked, "Are you quite alone in the world, Miss Halsted?"

"My father and mother both died when I was little more than a baby," she said, with that naïve frankness which was one of her strong characteristics. "An uncle, who was everything in the world to me, took charge of me until I was fifteen, when he too died;

since then I have been practically independent. Oh, by the way, you know the Beresfords, my cousins in North Miningshire?"

"Yes, I know Beresford; he has been on several boards with me."

"I lived with them for some time, but I was always my own mistress. The girls' whole object in life is sport; with them I had not much in common, but Ker is a nice boy."

"Your character and opinions must be very firmly set after all this independence."

"I suppose so, I don't know. Strength is often due to appearance rather than reality, and even the little that one has is all gained at the expense of something else."

"Unless a man or a woman has no character at all, that is to say is a fool, what is gained in one direction must be lost in another. It must be so, individuality strengthened and cultivated leads to a degree of egotism, tolerance to indifference, self-control to contempt, frankness sometimes to shallowness."

Several things in this indictment struck Marion hard, but it was impossible to believe he was aiming at her personally. The extreme kindliness of his tone and expression, the gentleness of his manner, led rather to the conclusion that he spoke generally without reference to any individual, but she was too transparent not to exclaim a little bitterly: "Interest in oneself even if egotistical, is the first virtue; without it one can influence no one: frankness may degenerate into shallowness, as when one discusses one's friends with a comparative stranger, but it is at least better than the counsel of absolute reticence, with which I have the less sympathy because it is denied me."

The amused glint, which she had begun to look for, flashed into his eyes. "In a person of perfect insight and observation reticence would be no less than a crime," he said.



"Marion," said Gwen abruptly, as they undressed with delicious slowness before her bedroom fire, "you ought not to have that boy Stanley here much. He is in love with you."

Marion laughed a little scornfully. "I am in a mood to say I am glad of it," she answered. "Men do not fall in love with me readily."

"It is because they dare not," asserted Gwen.

"Besides, it will do him no harm," continued Marion, waving aside the interruption. "He must cut his wisdom teeth somehow; he has not enough money to marry, and is too young to do so if he had. Experience is good for the young."

"Good-night, dear," said Gwen, with something like a sigh. "You are awfully good to me, and you can't even conceive what it is to me to be here."

Marion swept into her own room, from whence she presently emerged clad in a long blue wrapper, and went downstairs. She threw open the door between the now dark study and drawing-room, and making a passage through the chairs strode to and fro restlessly from one dull red glow-worm of a fire to the other. She felt as if innumerable minute stings were planted all over her inner consciousness, and were burning and pricking until she could hardly bear the pain.

The complaisance with which she had viewed the image of herself had been disturbed; and the disturbance, though slight, was so unique as to cause great suffering. In the undisturbed serenity of self-satisfaction we feel a pin-prick where custom might have hardened us against scourges. Marion, ever analytic, sought to discover the causes of her own dissatisfaction, and found one in her treatment of Stanley. In spite of her scornful assertion to Gwen, she blamed herself for not having foreseen the consequences of her kindness to the boy. She had spoiled him and made much of him, and this was the

more dangerous because he was at an age when men often find their ideals in women considerably their seniors. Yet she had been quite blind to the probable consequences until to-night, when his glowing eyes and trembling hand had revealed to her that the possible had come to pass. Theoretically it was, as she had said, a thing of little moment ; he was at an impressionable age when to love is a necessity, and it was as well that he had lighted on an object of adoration so eminently safe as she was herself ; but in spite of her depreciation of youth, there was something very beautiful and pathetic in the heart-whole devotion of a good boy's first love ; it touched her with a sort of pitying pain, and made her heart ache. She might have spared him this ordeal. Poor little Stanley ! How soon would he get over it, and how deep did it go ? Would the vision fade away in contemplation of the utter hopelessness of his day-dream ? The whole matter made her feel old and weary, and the young freshness of his love revealed her as a *blasé* and faded woman. But the revelation of Stanley's feeling and her subsequent self-blame accounted only for a small fraction of the distress from which she suffered ; it was certain that there were other and deeper causes, and for these she immediately began to search.

"Egotism, indifference, contempt, shallowness." This was the arraignment to which she had pleaded guilty. Marion was by no means hardened in self-conceit, it was beyond her to stand up metaphorically and deny the charges. An uneasy consciousness that Mr. Pierson had been mocking her under the guise of sympathy lashed her with scorpion whips. He might have added to the list of his charges that of denseness, for she had not betrayed that she saw his intention, and he had, in fact, so far counted on her denseness that he had expressed that bit of fraudulent flattery at the end which she had gulped down without betraying that she suspected its genuineness.

She writhed at the remembrance ; it was curious that she should care so very much for what he thought, for, though he was a clever man whose opinion was well worth having, there were other clever men who might have implied much harder things without raising a quiver of pain. She had perceived his power and high intellectual level directly she had met him, and unconsciously her desire had been to prove herself his equal, to place herself with him serenely above the common herd of fools, on which they two could look down with contempt ; and now she was forced to the conclusion that he only looked down on that herd among which she was numbered. He was conceited then ? Why should she care ? But she was too honest to draw comfort from that soul-satisfying reflection for long ; whatever he was, he was not conceited.

He was certainly a deep man, a very deep man, and she had "given herself away," as the schoolboy phrase goes, every time she had yet seen him. Even in that first interview he had noticed and interpreted aright her poor little foolish smile of superiority, her attempt to stand on a pedestal. Every time so far she had answered to the image of her which he had conceived. Yet Archie's indictment was doubtless true : he was not a good man. She was glad to have been forewarned, otherwise she might have been so fascinated by his cleverness, that like those other poor deluded women, who doubtless had adored him, she might have let herself be unduly disturbed by his influence. Yes, she could imagine a rather weak woman taken in by his assumed simplicity. Poor silly sheep !

As for herself, was she not in reality deeper than he, seeing through him all the time, but drawing him on by her pretended *naïveté* ? Comforted by this reflection, which soothed the pin-pricks, she became calmer, and in time was able to retire to her room and go to sleep.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *BALL-ROOM PARTNERS.*

"Society is the stage on which manners are shown."  
EMERSON.

"WITH whom are you dancing next?"

The voice made Marion start, it was so very near, and the words were spoken almost into her ear; but turning, she saw that the speaker—an elderly lady with a deficient nose—was not addressing her, but a girl on the other side.

"I am not engaged for the next one at all," said the girl, without reference to her programme, "but the one after that is with Mr. Pierson."

"My dear, you are not going to dance with him!"

"I'm sure I don't want to, but partners are scarce to-night."

"I don't suppose he can dance at all; a man of his figure should not attempt it, he can only make himself and his partner look ridiculous."

"He's quite a common man, isn't he? I thought you said he had been a pit boy."

"Yes, it is true. He is clever, of course, but not a desirable man for you to meet."

"Oh, come, Aunt Edith, you introduced him to us yourself."

"To your mother, not to you."

"I judge that whatever mother can digest is food for me," said Sibella inelegantly.

Marion was amused by the little colloquy. She had come to the ball that evening in the highest spirits, but when she had seen Mr. Pierson among other men she had suddenly realised his uncouthness, and her gaiety had been displaced by a rush of mortification, which was not lessened by the vision of herself and her partner in the wall mirrors, she erect, rather rigid, and he ungraceful, occupying with outspread arms and flying coat-tails the space of three men. It was an indisputable axiom in her code that she must have her own approval in any case, whether she were breaking the conventions and earning the disapproval of others or merely following the beaten track of a prosaic social round; and to look ridiculous she considered inexcusable in either set of circumstances. Long before the music ceased, however, she had forgotten the impression she was making on the onlookers in a sense of exquisite satisfaction. For, in spite of appearances, Mr. Pierson danced to perfection, he was as light as a feather, and his steering in the crowded room was little short of marvellous. Marion yielded herself up to the enjoyment of the moment, and dismissed all idea of ridicule, and thus they danced until the music stopped.

"At that rate life is abundantly worth living," he had said, as they drew near to the doorway, and in her heart she had acquiesced. Unable to find a seat, they had wandered up and down until the beginning of the next dance, and had parted in the expectation of meeting again later on in the evening. It was for this that Marion was waiting when she heard the above conversation. But though other men claimed their partners, and though the elderly lady was carried off to supper, Mr. Pierson came not, and Marion turning, on the removal of the intervening obstacle, to the girl on the same sofa, discovered

that she was an acquaintance, Sibella Mander, and greeted her accordingly.

"Oh, is that you, Miss Halsted?" asked Sibella lightly. "I did not see you until aunt moved. I am so glad, for I can talk to you without fear of your being shocked."

"I don't think people are easily shocked nowadays, Sibella—at any rate, I should not have classed that among the vices of the present age. Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Very much, thanks, but that's rather an insipid question to come from you. It reminds me of my first ball, which was intolerably dreary, a long vista of men, one to each dance without repetition—they only asked me because they had dined at our house—and every person I met inquired how I was enjoying myself. I felt inclined to say, 'Very much, thanks; I am always happy with this dear boy,' whether he were an old fogey or a young man who considerably fancied himself."

"You silly child! Why aren't you dancing now?"

"Don't know, neither do I care. I'd just as soon talk to you. It's not a particularly exciting ball. Number 1 isn't here, and I've had enough of Number 2 for the present. Don't you understand? Oh, Number 1 is the man I should like to marry, and Number 2 is the man who wants to marry me, and who will therefore probably be my fate; men always do get their own way, don't they? There's a man here, Mr. Pierson, who is my partner for the next, do you know him?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't want to dance with him a bit, but I suppose I shall have to."

"He dances extremely well."

"Oh, if you've tried, that's all right. I don't fear to look ridiculous, if I follow your example."

Marion smiled, and the man they spoke of came toward them with apology on his lips.

"This is really not fair, Miss Halsted ; you told me you would be in your own particular corner of the ball-room, and consequently I have wasted much precious time in struggling into the vortex and out again."

"It was so hot," she said, "that I was obliged to come out here. Is it worth while trying to dance in that throng just now?"

"No. May I take you to get some supper instead? And perhaps you may find another dance lower down which you could spare for me?"

She nodded assent.

"Then we will begin in good time before the crowd gathers. You see, I grudge giving up any of the good things I can win from Fortune." He piloted her to a seat in the supper-room, and as they sat down he added enthusiastically, "I don't know when I have enjoyed myself as I have done to-night."

She studied him quietly. She noted his crisp hair, his strong mouth, the abundance of virile energy in his movements ; surely no man who was vile or a hypocrite could overflow with such pure boyish pleasure about a mere dance.

"Is there no more of that life story for me to hear?" he asked, turning to her.

The fascination of his presence was once more strong upon her, she would have answered anything he cared to ask.

"You have heard all there is to tell," she answered. "I was consistently spoiled until I was fifteen, and since then I have been my own mistress. But it is not a great misfortune, spoiling is not quite so harmful for girls as for boys."

"Girls *should* be spoilt in that sense," he said. "Woman was meant for homage, admiration, love. One sees such desolate little grey girls wandering alone through life's dull places."

She marvelled that this also had come under his notice.

"Yet prosperity sometimes makes women insipid and selfish and thoughtless."

"Instead of vital and full of illumination? Perhaps; it depends greatly on the innate capacity for idealism."

"I think I understand. The capacity for idealism is at the root of all goodness in human nature. It means everything—principle, progress, and consistency; an ideal is the stiffening which binds all the chaos of ideas and qualities in one homogeneous whole; the appreciation of what is nobler than oneself is the only cord to draw one up. A man without ideals is the saddest thing in creation."

"I know a sadder," he said, in a voice full of feeling. "A man who has had ideals falling away from them and realising his own descent; for, after all, there is nothing so murderous to a man's good tendencies as to know himself on the downward grade."

"And after the agony comes spiritual deadness, for he has killed his soul," she said quickly.

"Is that your theory? In some cases it might fall short of deserts. This is deep for ball-room talk; let us come to the surface again."

She had noticed that he used no little softening tags to his conversation; it was not "don't you think?" and "isn't it?" but invariably a plain statement of fact which at times struck harshly on an ear unaccustomed to it.

"I never lose myself in a ball-room," she rejoined. "I can talk just as seriously here as elsewhere. I always think that those people who condemn dancing must be highly excitable and hysterical; they get unbalanced, and, measuring others by themselves, condemn a perfectly innocent pleasure as harmful. Are you idealistic? I suppose every one is, more or less."



"Ideals launch most of us forth into life, and keep us going until we are about thirty—that is to say, if they have been fairly strong ; but by that time we are generally free from them, they drop off like the tadpole's tail when he has developed feet and can walk on dry land."

She looked at him reproachfully.

"Isn't it a nice simile?" he asked, with a twinkle in his eye. "Here's a neater one. They are the toys of childhood: one reluctantly gives them up, and, being a big boy, mustn't cry for them again."

"That's better. By the way, I have told you of my life ; tell me of yours."

"First underground, pit work, noisy, dark, draughty, but fascinating too ; then brain work, study from morning to night, one endless effort to reach the platform from which most young men start ; then business, flying from one meeting to another ; shareholders, directors, companies fighting for one ; time worth any amount a minute ; telegrams, trains, etc.—then—well, then this."

"What a summary ! Where did you learn to be so terse, yet so descriptive?"

"I learned it from you, from reading your books."

She playfully repudiated the compliment as they passed down the staircase, at the foot of which Stanley stood waiting for her. She went away with him thinking all the time that far down on the programme there was yet another dance to be enjoyed ; she had not speculated joyfully on a dance to come since the earliest days of ball-going.

"How beautiful Marion is looking to-night," said Gwen, as she stood by Philip's side. "Every one praises her, she is so clever and so interesting."

Poor Gwen had suffered qualms in regard to her dancing, qualms justified by experience, for she had lost step and trodden on her partner's toes many times, and had had in consequence the mortification

of hearing the suggestion that the remainder of the dance should be "sat out." With Philip only had she finally overcome her nervousness so as to dance passably, for he had taught her as if she were a child, telling her when he was going to begin, and where she made mistakes. He danced perfectly himself and so had the less difficulty in controlling her erratic movements.

"Marion?" he said, in answer to her remark. "Yes, I suppose she could be fairly called beautiful at times, and for a beautiful woman she is amazingly popular with her own sex."

"People differ so as to Marion's looks."

"Yes, she varies enormously, but so does any woman who has any charm at all. She is looking better than I ever saw her to-night."

When the music stopped he led her away to a quiet corner, and leaning back he said, "What a pity it is one can't live always by artificial light, and escape the monotonous day. London is hideous just now; I think of it as I saw it to-day when I was crawling along into an interminable sea of grey mud bordered by gritty houses."

"I know now," she said, with sudden decision.

"What do you know?"

"I know what you work at, but I sha'n't tell you, for if I'm wrong you'll laugh at me."

"What made you guess?"

"Many little things during the last two evenings, but it was what you said just now that made me sure I was right."

"You're extraordinarily sharp," he said, looking at her with new eyes as if he had suddenly discovered she was a human being with character and not merely a good harmless little girl with whom he had danced half the evening because he had no need to exert himself to talk to her. "You're right, you know. What do you think of it?"

Gwen folded and unfolded her fan. "I am very much interested, Captain Denver."

"It seems rather an odd line to take up," he said, a little nervously, "but I had to do something. I can drive, and a licence was not difficult to get. It was the 'crawling along' that gave me away, I suppose."

"Yes. Hasn't any one recognised you?"

"Not yet; they will, of course. But as a matter of fact I drive at night, and as our London streets are not particularly brilliant, recognition may be postponed."

"It's only temporary?"

"Until about the end of February, when my uncle from the Cape will arrive."

"You say you are working at night, but you spoke before as if you had been driving to-day."

"I see it's quite impossible to deceive you," he said laughing, "you find me out at once. The fact of the matter is, I can't afford to lose two days in one week, so I persuaded the governor to let me have a cab as so many men are off on Boxing Day."

"Do they allow that?"

"Not as a rule, certainly not in the big yards, but our man is a small owner. His own son drives one cab and there's only one other fellow in the yard besides."

He felt a relief, as if from high tension. It was unexpectedly pleasant to discuss matters with this grave little girl who betrayed neither surprise nor disgust, but took the revelation as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Does Marion know?" she asked, at last.

"No, I can't bring myself to tell her."

"I wish, if you don't mind, you would tell me something about it. What do you do? Is it very cold?"

"Quite blasphemously cold," he assured her. "There are the shelters though, little stuffy oases of warmth in the midst of a slimy sea."

"It is a hansom, I suppose?"

He assented.

"And the other men, don't they chaff you?"

"There is a certain amount of misconception on that point," said Philip, who was rapidly regaining his customary spirits. "They don't chaff me, because all of them, down to the old fellow who wears a red cotton handkerchief round his neck, and has been fixed to the box of his four-wheeler so long that nature has coloured him to resemble the faded green of his surroundings, thinks himself quite as good a gentleman as I am. They know, of course, that I have been what they call a toff, but that is merely a difference of external circumstances; now that I am reduced to their level, my toffishness has departed. My share of the ordinary chaff of the cab rank I receive among the others, but I get nothing especial on account of my station in life; with them difference of class is nothing, difference of position everything."

"But there must be a few who realise how unlike themselves you are, those who have been coachmen?"

"Yes they are certainly the most perceptive. There's a rascal of a lad too, the same who comes from my yard, who is quite aware of the distinction, but he treats me with a pert familiarity which I can't resent because it is so good-humoured and at times really funny."

"Yes?"

"Then there is Jerry, he's the old fellow with the red cotton handkerchief. He has been driving for forty years and is quite the autocrat of the shelter which I chiefly frequent; there is one corner he must always have, he turns out whoever happens to be in it; but he tells the most admirable yarns, always new and always good. To begin with, his face is enough to make a cat laugh. It seems to be made up

of all the odds and ends of other faces, rejected by their artists, and overlaid with a coat or two of whimsical varnish just to stick them together and make the misfits pass muster. But he has a temper—I never saw a man flare up so; to try to stop him would be like trying to stop a sky-rocket with one's finger. I saw him myself one day throw some copper straight at a lady because she had given him threepence extra, instead of sixpence; and as for language—well, I thought I had heard something of that in my time, but I never even conceived the possibility of a vocabulary like Jerry's; when he begins, if you can't get out of earshot, the only alternative is to hold your hair on, and sit tight until it's over."

"It's difficult to realise your living among such surroundings."

"If one had been born in that mould, I could imagine it's not being a bad life; but where the shoe pinches is in the continual association with these men; it's the same drawback as there is in enlisting in the ranks."

"Yes, I have often wanted to peep into one of those shelters; are they well kept?"

"You would be surprised at the cleanliness and good management, and the food is good of its kind; some of the men behave quite passably, but then, you see—it's the others——"

"The next dance has begun," she remarked.

"Are you engaged for it?"

"No."

"Then let us stay here—unless, perhaps, you would rather cut my acquaintance now?"

"You don't deserve to have another dance for such an aspersion," she rejoined with spirit.

He looked at the strong, clever little face, and sank back into the seat from which he had just risen with a feeling of contentment; his habitually cheerful view

of the world had returned to him, the dark moments were few and rare.

"I am ready whenever you want to go, Marion," said Gwen, an hour or two later, when there were only two or three dances left.

"All right, after this one then," said Marion, who had just attained the point toward which the whole evening had been more or less a prologue, and she went off in radiant spirits with Mr. Pierson. The dance was fully equal to her expectation, the room was less crowded than it had been, and together they waltzed through to the end, and drew up at the door as the last bars were played.

"Exactly right," he said, looking down at her glowing face. "You look as if you had but just begun the evening."

"Yet it is the end, and I must go."

"Go?" he asked quickly, as if the idea had not before occurred to him. "Nevertheless you must not deprive me of the interval."

She acquiesced, seeing that Gwen was talking to Stanley.

"Will you come to see my sister at Putney, Miss Halsted?" Mr. Pierson asked, when he had piloted her to a secure corner.

"Yes, certainly; I shall be very glad to do so."

"She is my half-sister, on the father's side; she does not live with me. She enjoys her hobby too much to be a Londoner, she only spares me a week or two now and then."

"What is her hobby?"

"The breeding of Skye terriers. She has any number of them, and shows them all over the country."

"That is a delightful hobby. Where does she live when she is in the country?"

"Not a couple of miles from your relations the Beresfords."

"Really, I don't remember——"

"She has only been there for two years; she was at first in the Midlands, but she found that the soil did not suit the little dogs, so she moved."

"I shall be very much interested in meeting her," said Marion.

Her convictions in regard to her companion were now settled in the diametrically opposite quarter of the compass from that of the previous night. Again and again during the evening she had told herself that no man of such warm heart, such overflowing spirits, such simplicity could be vile. He might, at some critical period of his life, have, in absolute sincerity, overstepped prudish bounds and earned himself the reputation of a knave; more than that she would not grant. She was ready to regard him as one in a thousand, to believe him to be enthusiastic, and charitable, with the real charity, the broad good humour, of genuine origin, which, according to Plato's definition, is so far removed from the mere silliness often called good humour. She told herself that this was her irrevocable impression, her ultimate estimate of the man; and as she drove away from the hall, leaving him standing in strong black and white, beneath the brilliant arc-light, she attributed to him the qualities of sincerity and geniality untainted by one atom of cynicism or hypocrisy.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *A VISIT TO FULHAM.*

“Il n'avait pourtant pas l'air d'un garçon banal aimant à communiquer ses affaires à tout le monde.”

LOTI.

MISS PIERSON was rather above than below the average height of woman ; in repose her figure gave an impression of grace, which was entirely destroyed in movement by the jerky angularity of her limbs. Likewise the upper part of her face, including the eyes, was prepossessing, but when she spoke the elasticity of her mouth became a distortion ; and so it was through every trait. Nature had endowed her liberally, and added to each gift a qualifying “but.” Was there a virtue ? it was negated by a counter-balancing fault. Was there a good quality ? it was obliterated by a bad habit. She was clever and bright, but her absurdly over-rated opinion of herself dimmed her pleasantness. However, in spite of all her drawbacks, she was the last person that Marion had expected to find as Mr. Pierson's sister.

When a man has risen from the ranks by the sheer force of genius the very power which made him rise is itself a potent concealer of defects ; but the women kind whom he draws up with him have no such cloak, they are dragged to the surface in spite of themselves, and may be as foolish and vulgar as he is strong. Miss Pierson was neither vulgar nor foolish. It is true that she could hardly have been



more than five-and-twenty, so that possibly the good fortune which had overtaken her brother had softened her way of life from the earliest childhood ; yet even so, some jarring note might have been expected. Yet the only trait which could have fairly been ascribed to her want of birth was the extreme self-satisfaction, the bubbling conceit, unsoftened by consideration or self-control. Her own praise was woven into every sentence, under the guise of self-disparagement or possibly as a quotation from some admiring friend ; but the subtlety of this method was so very slight, the subterfuge so apparent, that by it Marion gauged the shallowness of her intellect.

"No, I am not often here," Miss Pierson said, in answer to one of Marion's questions. "I am one of those foolish people who are never happy without a hobby. I have not the graceful instinct for repose, my busy brain never allows me to be idle."

"Your brother told me of your hobby, and I think it a delightful one. How many dogs have you now ?"

"Twenty-one. I generally have more. It is the greatest grief to me to leave them, but one must sacrifice oneself to duty, or one would never know a quiet moment. I am afraid I am most foolishly sensitive on that point ; indeed, I cannot tell you how much I envy quiet, well-balanced people, who do what they please without a qualm ; it must make life quite blissful. Do you love dogs ?"

"I did once," said Marion, rather sadly. "I haven't had much chance lately. It's cruel to keep a dog in London unless one walks a great deal, and I seldom walk."

"I have the instinct for dogs born in me, and they adore me, the darlings. I don't, however, believe in that foolish saying that dogs only love good people, though it is rather comforting to reflect on it."

"If that's true it's a poor look-out for me," said her brother, "for the little bow-wows can't bear me."

"Yes, it is a most curious thing, there is such an uproar whenever he goes near the kennels ; but then, dogs are very intelligent, perhaps they know that it is he who takes me away from them. Have some more tea, Miss Halsted ? Oh, I am so glad you will ; I pride myself on my tea, it is a great speciality. I am one of those foolish persons who are so ridiculously fastidious that they can't drink cheap tea, so that going to see my friends is often a positive martyrdom. I tell them they must bear with me, for it is a misfortune, not a fault ; it is due to the nerves being very highly strung, the doctor tells me."

"I am glad I do not suffer in the same way," said Marion ; "I care very little what I eat and drink."

"I hear from my brother that the dance the other night was a great success. I don't dance myself, though I have often been urged to try ; some one said the other day that so long as a woman is graceful and has a good figure, she may dance to any age, but I only laughed."

Her variations on the one theme threatened to be endless, and it was a relief when Mr. Pierson suggested that his visitors should look over the house and garden.

The house was a genuine old red-brick mansion of Queen Anne's time, standing in extensive grounds, not far from the river, between Hammersmith and Putney bridges. The high doorways, the wide, shallow staircase, the exquisite finish of the cornices and balusters proclaimed that from its origin it had been intended for an owner of wealth. It was completely and beautifully fitted up, but was hardly so uncommon as to warrant a solemn tour of inspection. The garden was not uninteresting, in spite of its dank beds of lifeless mould and dreary trees, for there was a conservatory, full of colour and bloom ; but on returning from it Marion and Gwen .

were led through the house from one room to another, and asked to pry and peer into every corner—a proceeding the more peculiar as their guide was a man. He did not even let them escape when they arrived at the upper stories of the building, for he opened one of the bedroom doors and pointed out the richly moulded fruits and flowers on the high overmantels and ceilings. On returning to the ground floor he preceded them solemnly to the kitchen, which was to all appearance quite modern. The whole pilgrimage occupied a considerable time, and Marion made several ineffectual attempts to shirk it; she was feeling irritated, and conscious that Gwen was revelling in the ridiculous aspect of this tour, and she inwardly framed small excuses and palliatives for future use.

Throughout the house they encountered no one until they arrived at the study, where a handsome delicate-looking young man was writing; he rose nervously at their entrance, and was introduced by Mr. Pierson as his secretary, Mr. Castle.

It was then high time to leave, and in an exasperated state of mind Marion broke away from the house. She was not anxious to plead justification prematurely, so waited for Gwen to be the first to speak; but as Gwen showed no intention of gratifying her by advancing any charge, Marion herself felt bound to begin tentatively, "Charming house!"

"Do you like that man, Marion?" asked Gwen with unexpected abruptness.

After the unsatisfactory visit the question could be fairly answered in the negative on account of the irritation of Marion's feelings, so she snapped out a "no" in a tone as abrupt as her friend's.

"Neither do I," said Gwen. "He bores me, he is so anxious for one's opinion—fussy I call it, though, perhaps, that is not a suitable word. I mean he's always on the alert, he hears everything, and that

makes one uncomfortable. Dear me, how many gaps there are in the expressing power of the English language!"

"He was only anxious to please us," said Marion, instantly taking up the defence.

"He embarrasses me," replied Gwen.

Marion smiled slightly. Mr. Pierson, of all the men she had ever met, embarrassed her the least.

But Gwen was speaking again.

"I can't help liking the sister, though she is so naively pleased with herself; she touches me, there is something pathetic in the unconsciousness with which she betrays her own conceit."

"I hate her," said Marion suddenly. Then after a moment she added with a quick characteristic laugh, "You know that is not true."

The next day Gwen left Lexham Gardens in order to visit some friends living in the north of London, before returning for a few days at the end of her holiday. Her companionship had been very pleasant, and Marion felt unaccountably low-spirited when she bade her little friend good-bye, even though the separation was but for a brief fortnight. She was engaged to go to a concert with some acquaintances that evening; she did not feel inclined to go, so she sent Clemence with a note of excuse, and told her to go to Mudie's Library on her way back, and get, if possible, Dance's latest book, "Loyalty."

But Clemence returned empty-handed, the run on the book was great; there was no copy in the library, though the man had promised that the first that returned should be set aside for Miss Halsted. Marion was disappointed, she had counted on having a long, comfortable evening, lost in the latest masterpiece of her favourite author; but a long evening without a book was a different matter; she wished she had not so hastily put off the concert. After dinner she wandered vaguely round the room in search of

something, she knew not what, and all at once took herself to task. "Here am I," she exclaimed, "as grumpy as if I had not lived alone for years, all because I've had Gwen's company for a week. Dear, dear, the sooner my old hermit shell grows hard again the better for me."

She settled down to the daily papers and managed to occupy herself with them until about half-past nine, then she dipped into a new magazine and tried the solace of a cigarette ; but at ten o'clock she flung the magazine aside also, and yielded to the restlessness that had been threatening to swamp her all the evening. Outside, the roads, slippery with frost, were shining where they caught the lamplight like a frosted Christmas card ; overhead the stars were glittering like sword-points directed menacingly at the little spinning ball of the world ; the night was keenly cold and very clear.

Ten minutes later a figure muffled in furs passed down the steps of the house and crossed the road ; in the prospect of a walk which had for her the recommendation of novelty, Marion had found a temporary anodyne for her restlessness.

She turned out of the Gardens and into the Cromwell Road, and followed a man and a woman who were walking in the Earl's Court direction. As her pace was exactly the same as theirs, she neither gained on them nor fell behind. Now as they approached each successive lamp-post their shadows coyly ran before Marion's, swinging round with diminishing height until the post was passed, and then lengthening out again symmetrically until her shadow, in swift pursuit, caught them up and merged in them once more. Marion found herself watching this double movement with a kind of pleasurable anticipation, as if it were a game ; and the same spirit which compels people to count their steps or to avoid the joints in the pavement compelled her to observe

certain rules, one of which was to keep the exact distance between herself and the people in front which made the apex of her shadow fall just within the dark outlines of theirs as it rejoined them after the temporary separation. She was watching with such breathless interest the fulfilment of this self-imposed condition, that she did not notice how very nearly she was treading on their steps until the woman's voice struck on her ear distinctly, and recalled her to herself.

"Thank God, Carrie didn't love him, or he'd have broken her heart ; it was only the shame of it she had to bear."

Marion's busy brain took up the parable instantly, with those words as text, and the game of the shadows was forgotten in the new thought, while she worked out the subject after her own fashion. Carrie had not loved him, and it was therefore the better for her. They were husband and wife presumably, and when he had deserted her, or worse, it was only her pride that suffered, not her heart that was pierced to death. Then there were cases in which not to love was clearly "better"? Yet Marion herself had yearned to love, even if it included suffering ; she did not want the better part if it meant a calm no-love, and perhaps even in suffering a great love might bring its own remedy. If the unknown Carrie had greatly loved she might have saved the man ; it was possibly her coldness which had driven him to the devil. The old story—a cold woman, a weak, affectionate man.

Bah, how sophistical she was getting! Why build up on such a trifling phrase a whole drama of the world ? It was little better than the problem of the ancient monks, how many devils could dance on a needle's point ! She tossed away that thought also.

She met the brisk air as if it were a challenge, and rejoiced in her healthy circulation which defied it,

and turning into the Earl's Court Road, strode along, noticing all that went on around, and germinating new thoughts every instant. But she was unaccustomed to walking, and by the time she came to the Kensington Road she was tired and quite ready to go home again. She looked out for a hansom, but they all seemed to have disappeared, and it was not until she was almost abreast of the Town Hall, in the High Street, that she overtook and hailed one which had been lazily crawling along on the other side of the road.

She mounted the footboard and stood there in order to give the man his directions; but instead of speaking, she remained dumbly motionless, facing him with a smile dawning on her face. He leaned slightly forward, holding the reins aside, and the reflection of her smile showed itself on his face, with a touch of defiance added.

"Well," he said at last, "you shouldn't do these things, you know; you are bound to be caught sooner or later. Rambling about the streets at this time of night! Phew! Get in and I'll take you home."

Marion burst out laughing. "That's all very well, Mr. Philip, but I'm too old to be caught by chaff. It is you and not I who are the culprit, and have been found out. Oh, what an idiot I was not to guess!"

"Get inside," he suggested, "and scold me through the trap."

"But I shall not know if you're listening," she protested, obeying the suggestion.

"I sha'n't be such a fool as to lose anything," he retorted, making his horse walk slowly eastward.

"Oh, I am so much surprised," said Marion. "It never occurred to me that you could do this; perhaps because you are so fastidious."

"There's nothing especially dirty about this job."

"Well, the driving is all right, and you have a nice little horse. Do you clean your own cab?"

He hastened to reassure her on that point. "There are cab-washers, of course ; you might have guessed that in these highly specialized days."

"There is no reason at all why a gentleman shouldn't drive a cab," said Marion reflectively. "I've often wanted to do it myself."

"Your little friend guessed my trade," said Philip.

"Did she? Well, I suppose I'm getting so entirely self-absorbed as to be deaf and blind."

"Eh?" from the trap.

"I *am* surprised," she went on ; "but it's rather fun, isn't it? I wish I were in your place."

"You are too old to be so idealistic, Marion. There are no end of disagreeables in cab-driving. Dirt and cold, objectionable sights, and a perpetually public life, these sufficiently counterbalance any 'fun.'"

"'A perpetually public life'—that's well expressed. Yes, I understand that ; being always in the streets, no seclusion, no aloneness, it would make me feel as if I had a hard-baked skin all over me—but oh, Philip, perhaps I am preventing you from getting fares! What would you have done if you hadn't met me?"

"Sauntered along until I picked some one up. I had just taken two ladies to a ball at Kensington Town Hall. Made an impression too ; they asked me for my address that they might employ me again."

"Oh, how interesting! There are so many things I want to know. Do people underpay you as a rule?"

"No, they're generous enough ; I've nothing to complain of."

"Have you ever met any one you know?"

"Sometimes I see some of my old friends about, but only rarely ; they wouldn't recognise me, no one looks at a cabman unless he wants to hail him. A



fellow who was in my regiment hailed me the other day. I took him too, but he was in such a frantic hurry he never noticed me; besides, of course, it's dark."

"What will you do next when you leave me?"

"Saunter about. After about a quarter-past one or so we can go again into the Strand or Piccadilly."

"And then?"

"And then? Sights which even a lady novelist in search of experience should not care to see."

"But I do care, I want to know everything that concerns human life."

He was silent.

"It is so unsatisfactory talking like this," she continued. "I want to hear details. I wish you would come to see me."

"When shall I come?"

"To-morrow. What time do you begin work?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Turn up for tea at four-thirty then, and stay on for dinner. We can have it early so as to give you plenty of time. I am going out afterwards. I'm all alone now, and rather grumpy, because Gwen has gone."

"Very well, I'll be there."

As he drove her home her impressionable brain was dancing, first on one aspect of the case and then on another. The life of the streets had always interested her, it was the reality of the world. Here the inner side of the mask might be seen, or, by a more exact comparison, the other side of life might be made manifest—that hidden side, which, like the dark face of the moon, is ever turned away. Marion had often felt bitterly that the human world was entirely strange to her in one of its aspects, because she was a woman; the most careless youth about town knew more than she, with all her earnestness,

for she could merely peck and scratch at the surface, and never dig an inch deep. Could she but once know human nature in its reality, freed from its society clothes, from its veneer, she could read more clearly perhaps the riddle of the world's great mystery, and might be able even to penetrate the hearts of those sinning and suffering ones, whom she longed to reach ; she might be able to feel and to suffer herself, in their sorrows and joys.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH OF WOMAN.*

Yield that you may win.

"WELL, what is it that you want to know?" asked Philip, as he settled down for a comfortable chat the next day in his cousin's study.

"Everything, the bad as well as the good, where you go, and what you do, the odd people you see, the money you take, all the little tricks; really, Philip, there must be something very nice in the life."

"I could not honestly say there is any part of a night-cabman's work which could be described by that feminine little word, which, by the way, I should not have expected you to use."

"No quibbling; tell me, do you never enjoy yourself?"

"Yes," he admitted, "I do; with a clean, dry road, and a good little horse between the shafts, there's a certain satisfaction in the work."

Marion waited for him to go on, and he presently gratified her.

"If a man had an ordinary workaday epidermis, cab life might be very enjoyable, for some of the men are amusing, and thoroughly good chaps; take Peter, for instance, who comes out of the same yard as I do. I don't know why they call him Peter, it's not within a mile of his real name, which is Tom Curtis. He's as full of grit as they make them; he always

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makes me think of that plucky little brute—what is it?—the Tasmanian devil, that will go on fighting until it's all torn to bits, and even then the little bits of fur keep up a lively time on their own account. I'd like you to see the lad one of these days; you could 'put him in a book,' as the phrase goes. He's not very tall, but the way he carries his head, or the set of his shoulders, or something, gives an impression of unlimited pluck. A man who stands like that naturally, can't be afraid of anything on this earth. He certainly isn't more than one-and-twenty, though he has been driving for two years, having got his licence on a false statement of age. He has rather a decent face, hard, and chock full of mischief. I can't help liking the young beggar, though he has no respect for me. The first time I saw him was in a cab-shelter, and I was looking round for a hat-brush, and by mistake took up a boot-brush. 'No, dear boy,' he said, in an affectionately comic tone, 'that puts a shine on the other end.' Once he had a race down Bond Street with another cabby at two o'clock in the morning. That race is really an epic. Peter won, though the odds were against him, as his horse wasn't quite so good as the other man's. They went from the top to the bottom, past quite eight policemen, and at last a sergeant of police took a hansom and went after them; he was placed, according to Peter, for he came in third, and it was the narrowest squeak that the boy didn't lose his licence. The other man did, for his had been endorsed before, but Peter's youth and innocence, as he said himself, saved him, and he got off with a pretty stiff fine; but what he won in bets more than paid that, for, you know, the whole thing was arranged beforehand, and the odds were two to one against him. Fancy going full tilt down Bond Street of all places in the world, it's so narrow! That's just the kind of hare-brained thing the lad would do, though I don't know where

he found any one else crazed enough to race with him."

"I wish I had been there ; I would have raced with him if I'd been a cabman."

"Just what you would do."

"It's very interesting about Peter," said Marion, "but you haven't told me much about yourself yet ; are the policemen very hard on you ?"

"Generally. A cabman's their natural prey ; and, what's worse, they compel such a lot of lying. You wouldn't think it, but to be a successful cabby one ought to rank as a first-class liar."

"Where in the world does the lying come in ?"

"Well, you have to say 'engaged' when you're not sometimes, and you know they keep us out of the Strand, Piccadilly Circus, and all the theatre parts, just when the theatre traffic is on ; and no cab without a fare is allowed to pass in there, where most of the jobs are to be had. It is, I suppose, to prevent a block in the traffic, and to give the cabs which have been waiting on the ranks a fair chance ; but many men take in a false fare, called technically a 'buck'—that is to say, any decent-looking fellow whom they see—and drive him into the charmed circle. Of course he does not pay them, and they get a chance of picking up another fare ; but if this is found out the policemen are down on them at once. I don't do it often, it's too risky a game for a quiet-going fellow like me."

"Oh," said Marion, "it's much more interesting than I thought ; but what I should hate would be to live at the cab-shelters, to eat and drink after so many other men."

"There are a good many things in the world which it's well not to have too much imagination about," said Philip philosophically. "Any way, it isn't very much worse than an aerated bread shop, if you come to that."

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"I never drink anything at an aerated bread shop," said Marion, "though I don't mind eating a cake off a plate."

"Come, now, you haven't seen that cake made," said Philip.

"Horrid! Philip, I think you are already a little changed."

"You needn't tell me that, I know I am roughened and coarsened."

"No, it isn't that, but there is a change, though I can't define it."

"I should think," he said presently, "that a man learns more of real human nature during a week's cab-driving than he does in any other way in a year. It's extraordinary how much character there is among the men to begin with. As I have implied, their standard of morals is quite different from ours; the very best of them thinks nothing of a professional lie, it's all in the day's work, yet he may be perfectly honest in his home dealings. As a rule, he is extremely good-natured, and as for *esprit de corps*, I have never seen anything like it even in the army; a cabman who would give another cabman away would be a bad lot all round."

Marion stood by the fireplace, and looked at him. "Philip," she said very quietly. "I am going to drive your cab for part of one night."

"My dear girl!" he ejaculated in a tone of intense amazement. "Are you mad?"

She laughed. "No, not mad, eminently sane. We have only one life to live in this dear, sad, merry, wicked world, and I want to live that to the uttermost. I thought of this when you were driving me home last night, and your last sentence has decided me. I too will learn real human nature, with its sins and virtues, its lies and *esprit de corps*."

"But in any case, supposing I assented to this mad

freak, which I have no intention of doing, you couldn't learn all that in one night."

"I could get some notion of it. It is not the least use your protesting, Philip; my mind is quite made up."

He laughed aloud. "My protesting! Faith, that wouldn't be of much use; but this is sheer harum-scarum school-boy talk. You couldn't do it, you'd be found out."

"I have thought of it a great deal, and I have my plans. You shall bring the cab here one evening. I will buy a long great-coat that comes down to my heels, and under it I will wear my bicycling suit. I can brush my hair up on the top of my head, and I will have a special wig made, just to fit across beneath the hat—a top hat, I suppose—and I will get one of the best moustaches money can buy. Oh,"—and her tone changed from placid conviction to real mischief—"it would be the maddest, loveliest fun that ever I had—the very thought of it sets my blood tingling with excitement. Imagine the risk and the driving! You know at least that I am a good whip, you wouldn't be afraid of that? Is a hansom difficult to drive?"

"It's not at all difficult, it's the easiest of all vehicles for you have your wheels before you all the time and can see to an eighth of an inch where you are going. But that's not the question, you would be discovered at once; you wouldn't know the streets, nor the music-halls and restaurants; your voice would betray you the instant you spoke."

"I shouldn't speak more than was absolutely necessary, and then in as deep a tone as I could. It wouldn't be difficult to learn up the places, for I know London pretty accurately to begin with. There could be no danger, unless I ran into something, and I don't intend to do that."

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"It's been done before, it's not original ; now don't be foolish."

"It's not foolish. I should love it. Yes, I will do it ; if you won't help me I shall ask some one else. That young Curtis would do excellently ; I would give him a five-pound note for it."

Philip grew uneasy. "You don't consider my position at all. I should have to wait here, I suppose, in an agony, expecting to be summoned by a policeman every minute."

"Oh, you poor dear ! Yes, it would be bad for you ! Supposing I were found out, what would happen ? "

"You would be hauled off at once to the nearest police station, and given a month without the option of a fine, and I should lose my licence."

"You shouldn't suffer for that, of course. You see, you only contemplate driving for a couple of months more, so I shouldn't feel mean. The month in prison would be an experience, only every one would have to know. That's the worst of one's friends and neighbours, I do hate them to know my doings ; they would like to tear all my private life from me, instead of being content with what I give them in my books. But perhaps I should be let off with a fine. You see, if I took Curtis' cab instead of yours, and got him into trouble, it might be awkward, for I should feel bound to provide for him during all the rest of his natural life."

"That I'm sure you would—maintain him in the character of blackmailer."

"It would be objectionable. But drive I will. Oh, Philip, don't be so odious ! There are so few really exciting things to do in this weary world, I should remember it all my life ; it would be far better sport than bicycling round the City at midnight, which has so far been my most thrilling experience."

"It's pure nonsense, Marion ; I haven't the least intention of countenancing it, I was only arguing in order to bring you to reason."



"But why shouldn't I do it? Is it the risk to yourself?"

"I shouldn't have thought you had it in you to say such nasty things."

"I am sorry, but you are so obstinate."

"So like a girl," he murmured; then, "if you are sorry, will you promise me something?"

"Not to be caught by chaff," she retorted, laughing.

"No, it isn't to promise not to do it, but a smaller thing."

"I'll hear what it is first, then I will if I can."

"You can right enough, there's no doubt about that."

"Well?"

"Promise me that you won't in any case ask young Curtis—but I forgot, of course, you could not, for you would not know how to find him."

"Indeed I do! See how much I know! I would go to Scotland Yard and get his address."

"How could you? There would be dozens of cabmen of that name."

"But not called Thomas, and registered as age twenty-three. Ah, ha!"

"I wondered if you knew all that. Now will you promise?"

"Conditionally."

"And the condition?"

"That you will really think the matter over, and not dismiss it as ridiculous and preposterous merely because it is unusual. You see," she added as he did not answer, "I don't intend to take a 'buck,' or to wait in risky places, but to pick up a few fares about here, and come back the minute I feel I have done enough."

"I'll promise to consider it."

"All right, I'll leave you to think while I go and don a tea-gown, for it is nearly dinner-time."

She returned about twenty minutes later with an eager question on her lips.

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"Miriam, I'm afraid I can't," he began. "If there were just you and I, and no one else at all in the whole of London, I would not mind, but it's all the other people who make the consequences so tremendous."

"If they were not there, there wouldn't be many fares," she returned drily. "But I shall make up to perfection. I don't intend to run into anything; there won't be any consequences."

He fell weakly into his second line of defence. "I simply could not stand the waiting here, not knowing what was going on."

There was a long silence. Marion was kneeling upright on the hearth-rug before him with her hands folded behind her; suddenly she put forward one hand, and laid it on his.

"Philip, I give it up, because of that. You are such a dear that I couldn't bear to give you pain."

There smote upon him a sense of the inexorableness of woman's power, woman, who in yielding, conquered, and whose submission was her victory. How could he take a gift thus offered? He rose, shook himself, and stood upright.

"Hang it all, she shall do it if she likes," he said. "Yes, and anything else too."

"Oh!"

"But because I give in, don't feel compelled to go through with it. I shall be immensely relieved if you give it up of your own free will."

"I will think about it, but I have thought already. You see, it's this way. I am in a peculiar position, answerable to no one; why, then, should I hesitate? I have only myself to please, and the interest of this experiment far outweighs any possible risk; but I promise you I will think of it still further."

"I could drive you round one night," he said thoughtfully, "to give you a few tips."

"Why not to-night?" she asked eagerly. "You

could bring the cab here later on. In fact, it must be to-night, for I have only an evening party at eleven, which I could still manage, and every other evening for a week I shall be dining out."

"But if I come to-night that clinches the matter, and I thought that you were going to think it over."

"Perhaps the process will make me repent, by reason of the manifold dangers," she said slyly.

"Fooling me to the top of my bent?" he asked, smiling.

However, once he had practically yielded, he entered into the fun with as much zest as she did, and they discussed details—cryptically because of the waiting-maid's presence—during the whole of dinner.

Philip came back about half-past eight with his cab, and drove his cousin up Piccadilly.

"I am beginning to envy you, Miriam," he said. "The first time I drove a hansom I enjoyed it as much as anything I ever did in my life; but the joke is on a much grander scale for you, being a woman. Hang it, I can't be out of all the fun, I shall take another cab and shadow you all the evening."

"You will have to wait at home in case I come back," she said. "I have decided to tell Clemence of our scheme, and she shall answer the door for that night. She will enter warmly into the fun of the thing and love to see me driving; the pity is that I can't let her go out, or she might have stood at a particular corner, and I would have waved my whip to her—I was practising with a hearth-brush just now—or I might have flirted with her just before the plate-glass windows of the establishment wherein her young man is shopwalker."

"You know if you are taken up," Philip said, "you must look upon it as an advertisement."

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"Thanks, I don't care much for that sort of advertisement, nor for giving details of my private life to the public."

"Nasty selfish thing! Yet you, I suppose, delight in reading at what time the Queen goes to bed, and whether the dear, darling Princess likes her eggs under-done or over-done."

"No, I don't, not a bit. If I could talk to the Royalties, and really get to know them, I should like to find out how they felt, but as for unimportant details, no. It is not low life only that fascinates me, I would just as soon play at being a queen as a cab-driver if I could, but that's impossible."

"We can't all be Rudolph Rassendylls."

During the evening he called her attention to many little dodges in driving, and in steering through the traffic; he took her partly down the Strand, then back again by way of Pall Mall into St. James's Park; here he went slowly, and they discussed matters further while the lights of many other hansoms twinkled past them. When they emerged and drove by Grosvenor Hotel, Marion saw a very smart-looking cab standing before it, with a spruce young driver on the dickey. He raised his hand with an indescribably affectionate patronising gesture to Philip, and shouted something unintelligible.

Philip opened the trap. "That is Peter," he said. "I wonder whether it wouldn't be as well after all to take him into our confidence. He could keep near you and if you got into difficulty come to tell me. Young liar as he is, he'd be as close as wax over a job like this."

"Why, you said he'd blackmail me."

"I couldn't have let you put yourself under an unpayable obligation of that sort; but in this way he'd run no risk, and we could give him something for making himself useful."

After some consideration, she answered in the

negative, saying she preferred to carry out the scheme as already planned.

"What day is to be?" Philip asked.

"Wednesday week," she answered promptly ; and when she stood once more on her own doorstep, she called out, "Good-night, Philip ; it will be the greatest fun I ever had in my life, and it's awfully good of you to help me !"

## CHAPTER X.

### *FRIENDSHIP v. LOVE.*

"The highest compact we can make with our fellow is—Let there be truth between us two for evermore. It is sublime to feel and say of another, I need never meet or speak or write to him ; we need not reinforce ourselves or send tokens of remembrance ; I rely on him as on myself. If he did thus or thus I know it was right."

EMERSON.

MARION'S love of adventure rose up and swamped every other feeling during the week that elapsed before the execution of her project. Her ordinary occupations and social duties were but interludes, the real business was the preparation for the momentous night ; and in pursuance of this, she went to one of the best theatrical costumiers in London, and bought a brown cloth overcoat with velvet collar, several sizes too large for her, and had it padded to increase the breadth of her shoulders and add to her bulk. The hat she selected was a smart shining silk top hat, and the half-wig, which was to conceal her own hair brushed up, fitted on below this, and came above her ears. Her hands, not very small to begin with, would be amply disguised in a pair of Sleep's driving gloves a couple of sizes too large, and she chose a moustache not very large, but just sufficient to disguise without suggesting a stage effect. When completely dressed she was transformed into a slim, well-bred youth, and in the dress rehearsals carried on at home Clemence was lost in raptures of admiration,

"You do really look well, mum! A smart young gentleman, perhaps just a little bit too smart for a cabman."

"I'm afraid I can't tone it down," said Marion, "the clothes are all so new; but that won't show so much at night."

But the mere material equipment was only half the preparation, the mental equipment was as fully considered. During the week Marion learned the streets, places of amusement and restaurants; never did candidate prepare himself for an examination on which depended his future career more earnestly than she for her adventure. At nights she followed out imaginary routes, and set herself endless journeys across London; the promptings of a certain detached consciousness supplied the questions for her to answer. Even Philip laughed at her acuteness when he came in one day to see if she had repented of her mad freak, and when he had tested the accuracy of her knowledge he was bound to admit it was almost flawless.

At odd moments a thrill ran through the culprit as she thought of what she was going to attempt, for she was placing herself in a position of extreme precariousness, in which her safety would depend solely on her own judgment and skill; she was deliberately putting herself for the first time within reach of the law. Sometimes in imagination she saw herself hauled down from the dickey of the cab by an enraged policeman, to contemplate a cyclist skewered on the spokes of his own machine, or pictured herself pitched forward on the roadway by the fall of a broken-kneed cab horse; at other and more sanguine moments the prospect of a brilliant and triumphant career of daring adventure and successful escape led her on. The week passed rapidly, society functions succeeding one another with the monotony of waves on the seashore. At last Wednesday, the date

fixed for the adventure, dawned ; it was a cloudy and unsettled day, but if it rained, it would be easy to wear Philip's tarpaulin hat-cover and cape, and so render disguise the more complete.

In the evening, about five o'clock, just as Marion was contemplating ringing for Lu to have half an hour's play before being packed off to bed, the maid announced Mr. Pierson, and Lu's treat was indefinitely postponed.

A quick throb ran through Marion's heart as she rose to receive her guest, for though her last impression of him had been unfavourable, yet a visit from him was of more import than a visit from an ordinary caller. He settled down as if he meant to stay for some time, and a half-formed wish to be free from interruption ran through his hostess' mind. She gave him some tea, and in doing so inadvertently touched a pile of MS. sheets which lay by her side, so that one or two of them fluttered to the ground.

"May an ordinary mortal penetrate the mysteries of literary creation so far as to ask if the impulse is continuous or intermittent?" he asked, as he replaced them.

"At present neither," she answered rather wearily. "I have not written anything but fragments, notes to be used in future work, for a long time. I torment myself with imagining that the power has passed from me."

"The reservoir must have time to fill again, of course."

"But one has no certainty of its ever being full enough to overflow."

There was a long silence. Marion felt a pang of mental sterility. Since she had seen him she had secretly set aside many questions to discuss with him ; now that he was before her she was not only dumb, but incapable of thought ; the only words that



came to her lips were impossibly trivial or commonplace. She seemed to be suffering from a sort of numbness, and it was he who spoke again.

"You always seem to me to be in an unassailable position of vantage, Miss Halsted, by reason of your art; you are freer than all women and most men."

"I suppose I am free, but that is not the unmixed blessing I used to think; it entails great responsibility, and sometimes I would mortgage the freedom to lay that responsibility on some one else's shoulders for a little while."

"I could not imagine your submitting to or desiring a stern control."

She met his eyes and laughed, but again there was a pause; the conversation showed perilous chasms this afternoon.

"I called to say good-bye to you," Mr. Pierson said at last abruptly. "I am going north."

"For long?"

"Indefinitely. I go to-night by the eleven o'clock express after I have spent the evening with the lads at my 'home' in Charing Cross Road. You probably know that train?"

"No. I am not so busy that I cannot always travel in the daytime, but there are some very good expresses on that line. I wonder if you will see my cousins. It seems a long time since I have been in North Miningshire."

"I shall probably see Mr. Beresford. I am going to superintend the introduction of an invention which is to supersede hand-labour in the pits."

"An invention of your own?" She forgot herself in her interest, and in forgetting herself became natural once more, and the barrier which had hemmed in her thought was removed.

"Yes. Do you care to hear about it? I have worked at it for years. There are, of course, many inventions designed for the purpose, but this is on an

entirely new principle, and I have great hopes of it." He warmed to his subject, spoke eagerly, with almost boyish enthusiasm, explained and described, making clear to her by rough diagrams on a waste sheet of paper the mechanism of the thing. He was so intent, so full of his subject, that she caught his mood, and responded warmly to his explanations, her clever brain understanding him easily.

"But you'll work all the coal out at once," she suggested at last.

"We don't think of that, all our ingenuity is directed to increasing the output. The real difficulty lies in the opposition of the trades-union. Unions are sworn enemies to progress ; for the tyranny of the lord of the soil, they would substitute the tyranny of an uneducated minority. I daren't say that at a directors' meeting with reporters present, though," he added, smiling.

"I should not think there is much you dare not do," she answered quickly.

"Opposition attracts me certainly, the joy of battle has a fascination all its own. To be a god on earth, with no rival of equal strength, would be poor fun, it is the victory against odds that is a victory indeed."

Marion looked at him with sparkling eyes. "That is the only true tonic in the world," she cried. "Danger, real danger, it comes to you as a man in the course of duty—I, as a woman, have to go out of my way to seek it."

He laughed at her eagerness, but laughed sympathetically ; she knew that he applauded her feeling, and did not condemn it, being a man who accepted the ultimate consequences of things, and did not expect a woman high-spirited theoretically to be in action meek and cowardly.

He went on to enlarge on the present position of his invention, the measures which had been taken,

the precautions against defeat, and she listened as if the machine had been the child of her own brain. She led him on to confide in her details which were to be kept strictly secret, plans to ensure victory against the trades-union, which must not on any account leak out. He spoke glowingly, and she wondered how he could have shown himself so keenly alive to all that went on around him during the past weeks, while simultaneously this mighty scheme fermented in his head. One of his characteristics was this power of detachment ; it was as though his brain were split into thought-tight compartments, and he had only to shut down one trap-door to dismiss one subject altogether and begin another. He gave her a further instance of this immediately, for when the subject of his invention had been discussed in all its bearings, and Marion casually remarked that she had been sorry to miss Miss Pierson when she had called the day before, he set aside the invention, and began at once with warmth on the new topic.

"Were you?" he asked in a tone of genuine surprise. "I should not have thought you would have cared for her at all."

It was hard to believe in the genuineness of such ultra simplicity. Marion felt chilled and answered conventionally.

"She seems to me to be very clever."

"Yes, she is clever, in her own line, but it is not your sort of cleverness."

"Must two persons necessarily run in the same groove to be friends?"

"There you start a very wide question. I should want to know before I tried an answer, what is your definition of friend."

"Friend, distinguished from mere acquaintance, the usual commonplace."

"Have you many friends, Miss Halsted?"

"Of the Inner Circle perhaps half a dozen."

"I thought I should get at it that way. Now we have it. Of the Inner Circle. Very good."

"Men and women," Marion continued, "who could not be detached from one's life without taking little bits of oneself with them."

"I knew exactly what you meant, but I wanted to hear your own definition. To be a friend of that type, I think there must be a certain likeness in interests; for instance, I imagine your friends would at least all have one common characteristic, the quality which some man expressed rather neatly as 'Toute ma valeur, c'est que je suis un homme pour qui le monde visible existe.'"

"Yes, oh yes, certainly."

"It is a great gift to have sufficient adhesiveness to retain the Inner Circle when made."

"The friends who form it must have adhesiveness too, or they will drop away."

"Humph, not altogether; if you found that your estimate of one or the other had been incorrect, you might drop him or her."

"I should never number any one among my friends until I knew past all shadow of doubt that they were trustworthy."

"Then your friendship is of a secondary order."

She felt rebuked, and looked at him with startled eyes.

"If you ceased caring for a friend when you knew him to be worthless, you have not yet gained the highest platform. True friendship can afford true knowledge, as Thoreau says. Yours, I admit, an absolute faith, is a strong standpoint, but not the highest."

"I don't agree with you," she said spiritedly. "Friendship is, and must be, give and take; if one's friend sinned or went astray one could forgive as one claims at times forgiveness, but to discover him to

be by nature weak or deceitful, no ; pity and help might come in, but no longer friendship."

"Your point appeals to me : then you put friendship on a lower plane than love?"

Marion reached for a small book in a revolving bookcase near her. "Montaigne says," she said, "that a man can only have true friendship for one alone, that it is possible to love different qualities in different persons, but 'this amity which possesseth the soul, and sways it in all sovereignty, it is impossible it should be double. If two at one instant required help, to which would you run? Should one commit a matter to your silence, which, if the other knew, would greatly profit him, what course would you take?'"

"Give him a hint," said Mr. Pierson slyly ; but seeing that she was in earnest, he followed up his trifling seriously. "There the man mistakes what he calls amity for love, not so fortunate a translation as the remainder. Love of an individual, in the generally signified sense, is of course paramount to all claims of friendship."

"And what I wanted you to see," she said, speaking like an eager child, with flushed cheeks, "is that you also said friendship when you meant love ; of course a supreme, a real love would continue, even if the object proved worthless, but friendship is a more equal relationship : it must have mutual support—let one side collapse, the other cannot bear the strain alone. With love the lover gives freely, he asks for no return, he loves because he cannot help it, and if he does receive any return, he regards it as unmerited and wonderful bounty ; tell me, isn't this love?"

He nodded, smiling. "You have completely cut the ground from under my feet ; I acknowledge myself vanquished."

"I should like to know," she said rather timidly, "your definition of love."

An expression of great earnestness came over his face, and he remained in silence, but she knew he was considering his answer. She had asked him a hard thing ; he was a practical man, a man of action, and he rarely expressed those feelings which lay very deep. She felt instinctively that she had penetrated below the surface, that she had touched the real man, as she had never touched him yet, that from that moment her relations with him were altered, she could say in sincerity, "Let there be truth between us two for evermore."

When at last he spoke, it was in a different tone from any that she had hitherto heard, a tone of gravity and tenderness.

"I should describe it," he said, "in a series of paradoxes. It is at once the most solemn and the tenderest thing which is ; it is infinitely near, yet far beyond reach ; it is attainable by all men, but attained by very, very few ; in its growth it may be killed by a breath, by a look, but fully grown it is immortal ; it is by far the keenest joy on earth, yet brings with it the sharpest torture known to man ; it binds men more closely to this world than any other tie ; but heaven can only exist by reason of love."

He looked not at Marion but straight before him, pronouncing each sentence slowly and thoughtfully. Her ears drank in his words, her eyes were fixed upon his face, and something gathered in her heart and rose and overflowed her whole being. She felt a growing moisture in her eyes, and her lips trembled ; she was wrapped from head to foot in a new sensation, the quivering of a new-born life was in her, and as she gazed at him in a tumult of feeling, her heart said to her, "This is love !"

He rose, apologising with a smile on his lips for having been so serious, and she knew that he had spoken to her his inmost thoughts, seldom if ever, revealed to any one else ; he gave himself a little

shake, as if to bring himself down to earth again, and added, "These speculative regions are not altogether good for mortals who have to live in an ordinary atmosphere, they are perhaps a little enervating."

She answered something, she knew not what, and she was alone. Alone, with this wonderful knowledge of her own heart, with this great undying power for which in secret she had prayed for years, throbbing in her veins, and transforming her whole being. She had wearied Love with her petitions that he would come and take up his abode with her, and he had come in his might.

She stood by the mantelpiece, leaning a little forward, with her head resting on one arm, and the great tears brimmed over and fell down on the hearth; but the pain of joy was in her heart, unutterable thankfulness upon her lips. It never occurred to her to speculate on the future, on the possibility of her love being unreturned; the barrier had always been subjective not objective, the difficulty had lain in the stoniness of her own self; once this hindrance removed all things were possible. Her whole being throbbed with radiant gladness. Had this been a slow growth underground just waiting for the magician's touch to burst into full fruition? She remembered the day at Putney, and her mortification. How absurd it seemed now, how trifling the blemishes which had then annoyed her! Let Gwen, let the whole world deride, she could laugh. Those tales of Archie's—bah! ignorance was her only excuse for giving them a moment's credence. He, Mr. Pierson, had lived too simply, on too high a platform to please the multitude, and jealousy accounted for these spurious tales. She recalled the deep conviction of his tones, he at least had known love somewhere, had met him face to face, but she was in too glorified a state of exaltation to feel even one pang. Her transcendent state could not last long. She was brought down to earth

by a timid knock, and Lu, her face red with weeping, appeared. All Marion's tenderness flowed out at once to the child.

"My darling, what is the matter?" But Lu, nestling in her arms, only sobbed the more bitterly.

It was some time before the sobs grew less and the thick head ceased to shake itself so violently as to bump Marion's chin at every convulsion.

"What is she crying for, tell me?"

"She saided as if the gentleman stayed I must go to bed and not come to say good-night," and with the crystallising of the woe into words the tumult burst forth afresh.

Marion laughed aloud. "Why, you little duffer!" she said, "what are you doing now? You *are* saying good-night to me. It's all over."

But when Lu, restored to her normal condition of placid gravity, had departed in peace, Marion laughed again more bitterly; for were we not all children once, with our blindness and our self-pity, our want of foresight, our bitter woe, and equally unreasonable joy, and were there not these elements of childhood still within us?



## CHAPTER XI.

### *MARION DRIVES A NIGHT-CAB.*

"Much more enchanting than your mere white Heaven-angels of women, in whose placid veins circulates too little naphtha-fire."

CARLYLE.

THE transition from the deep emotion which had stirred the waters of Marion's life to their depths to the surface excitement of a madcap schoolboy prank was not easy. The divine warmth of the one killed or rendered colourless the bright sparkle of the other. Marion was still full of spirit, and thoroughly prepared to enjoy herself, but everything seemed of less moment than it had done, whether she were found out or not was of less consequence ; she stood on a solid rock of happiness which no catastrophe could cut from under her feet. But the very buoyancy of spirit that was in her would carry her through the new rôle which she was pledged to play that night. When Lu, consoled, had left her, she presently drew aside the blind and looked out ; the same conditions as in the daytime still prevailed, and though it was not raining the pavements were wet ; the air was fresh, without being cold.

At dinnertime Marion could eat nothing, and directly after, retired to dress for her part.

At nine o'clock, when she heard that Philip had arrived, she ran down, and found him standing in the hall, watching his horse through the open door. For the first moment he did not recognise her, so perfect

was the transformation, and then he burst out laughing.

"Hullo, this is capital!" he cried. "You'll take no end of fares. Oh, why am I to be out of it?"

Marion's eyes danced with fun as she surveyed herself in the mirror in the hall. "Oh, it's so lovely!" said she, with a blissful sigh, regarding the handsome young stripling reflected there. "No one would take me for more than two- or three-and-twenty, would they, Philip?"

"I shouldn't call 'it' exactly lovely, but 'it' will do very well," said Philip chaffingly.

"Oh come, you know what I meant."

"I say," he pleaded, "I'll be your first fare, and come inside for a little way, until you get used to the horse."

"Not a step," she ejaculated, wheeling round upon him; and at the sight of her face, so transformed, yet enlivened by her well-known defiant mischievous expression, he laughed again.

"You make an uncommonly good-looking fellow," he said. "How big your eyes are!"

"Come along, no nonsense," she retorted. "You go out first, to see there is no one in the street."

He did so and reported that all was quiet.

She ran down the steps, and swung herself lightly into the seat. "It's quite easy to get up, and very comfortable when you are there," she said airily, as she folded the rug round her knees. "It isn't going to rain just yet, I think, so I won't put on my cape or hat cover."

Philip made one more ineffective plea, and was promptly squashed.

"Ta-ta!" she cried, saluting him with the whip. "I'll bring you back a small fortune in silver," and she drove off.

The horse was a well-made little animal of a very dark-brown colour. Philip had said that he had no

tricks, and he had evidently been used to cab-harness for many years, for he went with a good will, rattling himself about in the shafts in his earnest desire to get on.

"It's all rubbish," quoth Marion to herself, "about not being able to see your horse; why, I can see a great deal of him, quite enough to drive by, at any rate."

It seemed odd that she should at last really be embarked on this adventure which had cost her so much forethought, and which had now strangely dwindled in significance, overshadowed by the greater event of the afternoon.

Mere adventure, how quaintly small it seemed, in view of the great fact that she loved. How often had she watched unattractive, undistinguished little women, and seen their faces transformed by sudden expression at the sight of some man, husband or lover, and she had felt that with all her advantages she took rank below them, from her ignorance of the great emotion, the fly-wheel of life's rotation; the knowledge of this incapability had embittered her whole life, she had considered herself as one who lacks a sense; so deeply had she felt it, that she could not mention it to her dearest friends, except in a jesting tone, a borrowed masculine device for concealment of deep feeling. And she had been so unconscious at the first meeting with Mr. Pierson of the tremendous revolution he was to cause in her life, she had imagined him a good, a very good, man, and had looked down upon him a little, as we do look down on those not so clever as ourselves—merely good; then when she had seen him thoughtful, she had become aware of the depth that was in him, and as she knew him better, in the inimitable words in which Victor Hugo describes the good bishop Myriel: "Respect, unutterable respect penetrated her by degrees, and made its way to her heart, and

she felt that she had before her one of those strong, tried, and indulgent souls, where the thought is so great that it cannot be other than gentle." And before this knowledge her heart had opened like a flower in the sunshine, and she loved !

In the relief and gladness which the revelation had brought every action was joyous and fraught with treble meaning.

She turned slowly into the Cromwell Road, and paused a moment before going eastward, then passing through Collingham Road, made her way to The Boltons. Never had adventurer gone forth with such unknown worlds to conquer as she that night. It was all perfectly novel, conjecture lost itself in mystery. She had driven quite slowly and carefully, and she took up her station on the east side of The Boltons, about midway down, and letting the reins hang loosely, she drew out her silver cigarette-case and vesta-box and lit a cigarette. It just crowned the full enjoyment of the situation, she could reflect so much better as she smoked a cigarette, and it rendered the disguise the more complete. A little thrill of pleasure seized her ; it was altogether delightful sitting there in the dark, seeing the foot people pass now and again, quite unsuspecting of the curious farce being played out within a few feet of them. The element of uncertainty gave also a touch of zest, there might be a "call" any minute, and then the curtain would be up in reality and the play begin ; so far the overture only had sounded. Marion, ever analytic, tried to imagine herself to be in truth the very man she represented, and endeavoured to realise the feelings of an actual cabby ; but she had not long played at this game when two sharp well-known whistles struck on her ear, and were instantly repeated. The horse started forward of his own accord as she gathered up the reins, but she pulled him up, and listened. The beating of

her heart, added to her agitation, prevented her from hearing whence the sound came.

She went forward a little, listening intently to the spasmodic repetition, until it dawned upon her that it issued from a house on the western side of The Boltons, almost opposite to the spot where she was. She urged her horse forward, as she had to go right round the centre oval plot, and dashing past the policeman at the end, she drove at full speed forward. She heard a wild galloping of hoofs advancing to meet her, and realised that another hansom was also in search of the prey, and at the same moment seeing a stream of light breaking from an open doorway, she whipped her horse to further speed. She was on her own side of the road, but the other cabman did not heed that, for he came down on the same side also, and meeting almost at the door she had to pull aside to avert a collision, which action left him victor. She was turning away, fearful that he would enter into conversation, when he shouted, "There's two on us wanted," so she stopped and fell in behind him.

Two girls and two men in evening dress appeared in the doorway, and, pairing naturally, entered the cabs. Marion heard the order, "Empire. Keep together," and they were off.

It was fortunate for her that she had a leader in her first job, and she followed him out into the Old Brompton Road, and up by Kensington station. He took the main route by Piccadilly. In the confusion of a first trial Marion had vainly tried to think which of the two great halls in Leicester Square was the Empire; she knew them both well enough really, but pure nervousness for the moment mentally dazzled her. However, the fact of having a guide, and therefore no necessity to solve the problem, reassured her, and before she had reached South Kensington station her nerve had returned. There

was some little driving required in the Brompton Road, and once or twice she had to pull her horse to one side to avoid collision with the leading vehicle when it stopped suddenly; the driver, however, generally warned her of his intention, and she could see for herself when a stoppage was likely to occur. Only once she got separated from her leader by a lumbering cart with that predilection for the centre of the road which such vehicles usually have, but she whistled softly, as she had heard cabmen do, and this at length produced the desired effect, though, as she passed, she could not resist the temptation of striking the canvas cover of the cart with her whip in retaliation for the delay. The cabs rattled away through the rocks of Knightsbridge into the main stream of Piccadilly. Marion settled down to enjoy herself thoroughly; she looked at many of the hansom drivers as she passed, and they at her, but she seemed to provoke no especial attention. Piccadilly itself was transformed into a wonderful Arabian Nights palace, a vast glittering corridor full of mystery and delight, through which she was carried swiftly as in an enchanted dream, and she could have laughed for sheer gladness of heart. This was as different from the prosaic thoroughfare that she traversed every afternoon of her life as it well could be. It was the point of view that made all the difference. She remembered how the familiar house and garden of her childhood had been transformed by the simple expedient of standing on one's head and regarding them upside down.

At the Circus there was a block, and as she sat beneath the brilliant arc-lights in full sight of everybody, she knew that now, if ever, discovery would be made. She did not dare to use her eyes too importunately lest she should attract attention, but she was keenly alive to any one who took notice of her. One great burly cabman was wedged so

## Fire and Tow

closely beside her that the hubs of their wheels touched, and before long she felt, rather than saw, that he was looking at her, and her heart beat fast as she stared stolidly before her; yet she comforted herself by thinking that even if he penetrated her disguise he would hardly betray her, it was the police she had to fear. Then all at once her blood turned to ice, for as the long-expected movement forward came, he said very slowly and distinctly:

"Fancy meetin' yeu!"

She turned and faced him deliberately, in spite of her panic, when she discovered that he was not looking at her at all, but had apparently addressed his remark to the world at large, and it was not until she had crossed the Circus that it occurred to her he had only been meditatively repeating aloud a catch phrase in vogue just then, which had displaced the ubiquitous "Now we sha'n't be long."

The cabs drew up at the Empire, without further hindrance, and the second young man, after assisting his companion out, handed up a florin. Marion touched her hat as she pocketed the coin; and resolved to follow her former leader in all his doings for the present. The "fare" had not even glanced at her, but she saw the commissioner scanning her rather critically as she turned away; however, she hoped that it was only the fact of her being a stranger, and the general smartness of her appearance, which had attracted his attention, she knew that these men were a great source of danger, and her only safeguard from them lay in their amenableness to tips.

The preceding cabman, as he wheeled round, asked her how much she had got.

"Two bob," she answered, speaking as roughly as she could.

He nodded and made his way to a side street, leading northwards off Coventry Street, where there

were already half a dozen cabs waiting outside a restaurant. The last comers took up their stand at the end of the line, but had not been there five minutes before a policeman swooped down upon them with fussy importance, and began sending them all away ; some of the cabmen went at once, with the resignation induced by custom, others tried to argue the matter, on the premiss of being engaged, a premiss not granted by the policeman. But whatever the others might do, there was only one course open to the pseudo-cabby at the end of the line, and that was to withdraw before the policeman came to speaking terms. Accordingly Marion turned back into Coventry Street, and after waiting for a minute got into the westward going traffic. She was passing the Criterion at a foot's pace, when an elderly man, with a bag in his hand, rushed out, and leapt into her cab. "To Charing Cross like blazes !" he yelled. Marion looked round, found an opportunity for a clear turning, took him down the west and south sides of Leicester Square, as hard as she dare go, out by St. Martin's, and through Duncannon Street. Luckily she got a clear road across the Strand, and ran into the station without a check. She had done the whole thing instinctively, though she had a vision somewhere *en route* of a cab horse planting its forefeet almost into her wheel, in its effort to pull up, and of its angry driver's volley of abuse.

The fare pitched a shilling on to the roof of the cab, and bolted into the station. Unfortunately, though Marion made a grab at the shilling, she missed it, and with horror saw it shoot down by the kerb almost under her wheel. She did not care a button about the money, but to leave it would create the wildest suspicion, not only among the porters running about, but among the cabmen behind who kept yelling "R' up," in various keys.



They might note it, and follow her, in order to badger her afterwards, worse still would it be if the policeman, who was some yards away, came forward to ascertain the cause of the delay, and picking it up himself questioned her; she was in a condition to credit a policeman with supernatural insight. The shouts behind were becoming desperate; she hesitated for a minute longer, uncertain whether to ask any one to hand her the coin, but being afraid of the betrayal of her voice, she decided, as the least among a choice of evils, to leave it there and drive away. Suddenly a little messenger boy, who had been watching the scene with impish delight, and had come to the conclusion that the cabby was too grand a man to dismount from his perch for such a trifle, ran forward and gave it to her. "My, but that cabby's a real toff!" he ejaculated in open-mouthed admiration, as she nodded to him and drove away.

There was some difficulty in getting out of the station into the flowing tide of traffic in the Strand, and Marion remembered that Philip had said that the last time a lady had tried to drive a cab she had been caught at Charing Cross; though arguing against such a coincidence as the repetition of this catastrophe, she could not overcome the superstition that the spot was unlucky, and breathed more freely when she found herself outside the precincts.

She was passing slowly westward through Cockspur Street, when three young men in evening dress, with overcoats, noisily hailed her. One of them, who seemed to be slightly the worse for drink, clamourously asked if she didn't "bloomin' well know where 'the Bunkers' was." Marion shook her head, she didn't at all like the look of this crew.

"Hold your tongue, you bally idiot!" ejaculated the tallest and soberest of the three. "Of course he

doesn't know, no one does, and if they did, I'm not going to a pot-rot hole like that."

"That's all very fine," said the third, "but where the—— are we going, I want to know? I'm not going to stand on this something pavement until I get rooted here."

"I'm off to the Oxford," said the tallest man, "and you fellows can jolly well please yourselves," and he scrambled into the cab, followed by his companions. "Oxford, cabby," they all bawled.

As Marion went up to Piccadilly Circus she noticed that it was ten o'clock, and that the "ranking up" process was being put in force. She steered with comparative ease up Shaftesbury Avenue, and out at the top of Charing Cross Road.

When she arrived at the destination her fares got out, and the tall man stopped to pay her.

"A shilling, eh, cabby?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Well," he ejaculated, "I'm blest. You're the first cabman ever I've met who's diddled himself out of sixpence; however, I won't be stingy, there's your eighteenpence."

She had forgotten the extra sixpence for a third passenger.

She took the two coins with a smile, and not until he had turned away did she discover that the smaller one was a half-sovereign. It was an awful moment! The man was vanishing into the entrance, and she could not shout after him. Yet to retain half a sovereign that did not belong to her! That was impossible!

"Ger' on, now, what are ye waitin' for?" asked a policeman. "Got a freehold of that bit?"

For answer she held out the coin to him mutely.

"Give it for a tanner?" he asked, grasping the situation. "Well, he's gone now, and we can't find him. What for didn't ye shout after him?" Then

looking keenly at her, he added, "There's something queer about you, young man, I'm not so sure but what——"

She bent down until her face was almost on a level with his, and slipped the coin into his willing hand. "Keep it," she said in his ear, and with a jerk of the reins moved on.

He wheeled round as if he were on a pivot, and directed his eyes steadily toward the building, as he addressed sternly a knot of small boys, "Get on with yer, what are you gaping about?"

But whether he had really fathomed the secret of her sex, or imagined she was only a "toff out for a bit of a lark," Marion never knew; she inclined to the latter supposition.

She decided she would now crawl slowly along Oxford Street westward, and if no fare arrested her progress, she would return to Lexham Gardens and report herself to Philip. It seemed as if she had been driving a very long time, and yet, counting the journey to the Oxford as one-and-sixpence, she had only taken four-and-six, not enough to pay for the hire of the cab. She had never before realised what an amount of making up in small coins a sum of money takes.

Then all at once something else flashed into her mind. Mr. Pierson had said, "I go by the eleven o'clock express, after spending the evening at the home with my boys."

It was now about half-past ten. Marion knew the number of the house in Charing Cross Road, as he had frequently mentioned it. He would be leaving soon; what was to prevent her going to catch a glimpse of him as he left, or even perhaps driving him to the station? Her heart beat to suffocation at the very thought, and she wheeled her horse round without any warning, thereby provoking the wrath of a following cabman, who, notwithstanding

his copious language, always did the same thing himself.

She found the house in Charing Cross Road without much difficulty; it was above the Circus on the western or older side—the side which had stood in uninterrupted sequence since the days of Hog Lane. The house itself dated from about the beginning of the century, and by its very aspect proclaimed itself to be condemned to obliteration in the growth of modern buildings. It was a dingy earth-brick house with no more architecture than is required in the construction of plane surfaces and right angles. As Marion approached, she saw a hansom cab standing before the door, and the driver, who was reading a newspaper by the elusive light of a gas lamp, showed by his attitude that he was engaged; she was too late. She hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry; it was partly a relief, for the strain of excitement might have been too much had she actually spoken with Mr. Pierson; besides, it was perfectly certain that his keen eyes would have penetrated her disguise, and she was not quite sure that she wanted him to know of her escapade just yet—not that she doubted his entering into the fun of the thing, but she felt she would prefer to tell him of it in her own time and place. She drew up her cab several yards behind the other, close by the kerb, and waited, watching the house as a cat watches a mouse-hole. He was there, the man she loved, in that very house. She felt a sudden great bewilderment at the strangeness of life, and of the material things by which she was surrounded; at the strangeness of these great grey houses on the right, sharply defined below, rising into indefinite dimness above; of the dusty human crowd that clattered and jostled and whistled in the street, and on the pavement; of the cabman, as he sat there, as unconscious of himself as an animal. All these material things around were so unreal, she felt as

if she could have laughed aloud and brushed them away, as in a dream, with her hand ; yet they were all supposed to be so real, those people were so serious, so much in earnest. How absurd it all was !

She sat there in a reverie for about ten minutes, and then the door of the home burst open, and several small boys dragged out a portmanteau ; but her eyes flew beyond the boys to the burly figure which blocked the doorway and which belonged to the man she sought. Mr. Pierson was speaking to the woman within, the matron or mother of the home, and he stood with his back half turned to the street ; but when the boys began to raise the portmanteau to the cabman, he said sharply, "Let that alone, lads ; it's too heavy for you."

The boys, however, continued to push and drag and heave the portmanteau to a point but a gaping inch below the cabman's outstretched fingers, and then their combined strength gave way, and the weight fell with a prodigious crack on the pavement ; a crack sufficient to break anything breakable the box contained. The offenders clearly anticipated a reprimand, but Mr. Pierson finished his adieu to the matron before he took any notice of them ; then, as he raised the fallen weight himself, he only said, "Obedience before zeal ! If you thump that into your heads, lads, as hard as you have thumped my portmanteau on the pavement, you will more than compensate me for any damage done."

As he drove off one of the bigger lads turned a somersault on the pavement.

"Obedience ayn't a very pyin' gyme," said he, "but it's the best I kin see on the board at present, so mind that, ye young uns," and they all went in.

Full of new thoughts, Marion traversed the length of Charing Cross Road, and retraced her steps westward along Oxford Street. All her faculties were supernaturally alive, and she saw and noted every-

thing as if she were detached from the body. When she had glided up this thoroughfare on her bicycle by night, she had seen the houses, pedestrians, and vehicles in a swiftly revolving panorama, now each item was fragmentary, individual ; her eyes and ears were opened, and she saw much that was new to her, and stored up many things to be pondered over in the future. This slow journey up Oxford Street was a distinct piece in the mosaic of her consciousness which was being put together day by day, hour by hour.

She was midway between the Circus and the Marble Arch, when another cabby reined up beside her and asked her for a light. Carelessly she handed him her silver vesta-box : he struck a match and examined the box attentively.

" You must be doin' better at this game nor what I am, to have a thing like that," he said critically. " And I know the vally of them things too."

He had a clean-shaven face of healthy ugliness, and a widely smiling mouth. He wore a billy-cock hat of a particularly squash-brained variety, set well on the back of his head, and his age might have been anything between thirty and forty.

" I've only made four and a half to-night," said Marion, adopting the idiom of the cab-rank, and speaking in as masculine a tone as she could. This was what she had long desired, a talk with a man on his own ground ; she felt that she would risk much to get a clear idea of life as it appeared to him.

" I've got eyes," he continued, " and I can see your sort. It's a bit over from better times maybe. Blow me, I know. I wasn't always a cabman. My father kept a tobacconist's shop in Manchester, a real fly one, none of your mixed concerns, half sweets and half baccy."

" How was it you took to driving, then ?"

" Me?" he said. " Well, I hate work, and I can

never keep on at a job steady, so to say. I'm off twice a week now when by rights I shouldn't. But they know me at the yard, and put up with it. You see, I've got what they call a tongue of my own, and I get round 'em. Yes, I always was one to enjoy myself. If my father set me up with a cab and hosses of my own, blow me if I wouldn't sell 'em before the month was out. I'll never do any good. Just enough money to get along with, then play till it's gone. Yet it isn't the rosy with me as with so many another, but just I can't keep hammering on at it. I drove a bus once, but they didn't see my bein' off two days out of seven, and no doctor's certificate to show for it. I like this job, it's easy and it's comfortable."

Marion listened with great interest. Good-humoured indifference to any serious side of life was so new to her, and seemed so common among these men who were all living in the same careless fashion. They had somehow arrived in a world which was not altogether bad, their lives were as good as most of those they saw around them, they never troubled themselves with futile problems on fate and their eventual destination; so long as a few shillings were to be had, everything looked rose-coloured.

It occurred to her to find out how her companion would have acted in the matter of the half-sovereign.

"Done? Why, stuck to it, of course. A fellow like that would never miss it. Why shouldn't I stick to a bit of luck that comes in my way? But you said you'd only made four and 'arf; didn't you keep it?"

Here was a dilemma! The fact of having passed the coin on to a policeman was too utterly preposterous to mention, and she could not for the moment think of any non-committal answer.

"Why, of course, what else was I to do?" she said, rather lamely. "I meant I had only earned four and

half——” Then she was silent; was she not as bad or worse than any man on the cab-rank? She had just told a lie for expediency’s sake in the same way as they did. How easily and readily it had slipped out!

A man hailed them from the pavement; as it happened, Marion was the nearer, but she reined in. “You go,” she said quickly, unwilling to deprive her comrade of the much needed shilling; then, seeing his look of astonishment, she added quickly, “My horse has done enough for the present.”

Another gratuitous lie!

He grinned back at her, and said in an admiring tone, “Ah, I see now, you’re a toff out for a lark. All right, I won’t split.”

The moral reflections evoked by the utterance of two lies in five minutes were enough to keep Marion’s thoughts indefinitely occupied.

“Of course, I should be just as untruthful as any man,” she thought. “And I felt so scornfully superior when Philip told me. I have only been straight hitherto because I was above the necessity for lies, just as being above the necessity for stealing I have not stolen. How one’s cardboard morality withers away when it is tested; and I never knew that before either.”

“D—— you, you everlasting fool! must I knock your horse down before you stop?” ejaculated a large, rather coarse man of the well-to-do commercial stamp, who had been vainly trying to attract her attention.

“Ah, sound asleep,” he added, as she started violently. “All you’re fit for. Take me to the ‘Bell and Horns,’ Brompton Road, and look sharp.”

She woke up instantly, and took him by Hyde Park Corner. She happened to know the particular public-house well by name, and she wondered what would have happened if he had directed her to some



remote part of London ; she was sure she could never have followed verbal directions. So far her luck had been distinctly good, she had not been sent into unknown regions. She enjoyed the drive, speculating on the unconsciousness of her fare, and wondering why he wanted that especial public-house, particularly as it was not far from closing time ; perhaps he was the proprietor. Would he give her a shilling, or one-and-six ? On the way she passed a cabman who recalled Peter, and she wondered whether she should see anything of that young scamp to-night.

After this job she would go to see Philip, but she didn't intend to give up the part she was playing just yet, it had been too successful to be lightly relinquished.

Her fare got out when they arrived at the " Bell and Horns," and without paying her went in. He returned a minute or two later with a pewter of beer in his hand. " That'll wake you up," he said.

A strong sense of the ludicrousness of the position seized Marion. It was all she could do to keep a grave face, but entering into the spirit of the thing, she drank off the beer and, emptying the remaining drops in the roadway in approved fashion, handed the pewter back with a nod of thanks which was genuine enough, for it was now nearly midnight and she was both cold and thirsty. The man told her to wait, and disappeared again. Directly he had vanished she casually began to eat some biscuits she had brought in her pocket ; but she was not long left in peace. Two omnibuses, one belonging to a very new line, running to the wrathful indignation of the older established company, came up together, and began " playing about " at the corner. The conductors both shouted " Higher up," to Marion, who moved a few steps on. During the game the buses swung out and blocked the road to further traffic,

and this immediately brought down upon them a member of the authoritative force who was evidently in a raging temper already, and prepared to pour his wrath on every one ; when he had taken the numbers of the offenders, threatened to summon them both for obstruction, and had been answered in choice language which was as oil on flames, he advanced toward Marion.

"Get away there," he shouted, "or I'll summons you too."

She dared not answer him, but crawled on a few steps more.

He followed, and spoke in a tone that made her blood boil. "Get on, I say."

She trembled with wrath, but still remembered to speak in as deep a tone as she could.

"Engaged !"

"You lying scum !" he retorted. "I see him pay you off."

"Go and ask him," she answered furiously.

"I'll teach yer to answer me, I'll give yer a lesson," he replied, fumbling for his note-book. Marion felt that the moment had come, for this man was an odious specimen of his class, a hectoring bully, who would never let her off ; and she wore, of course, Philip's badge, and Philip would have to appear to answer for her.

"Give me your number," he said roughly, "and we'll soon see if you're engaged."

Marion's temper was not readily roused, but she felt it getting the better of her now. A few more remarks in that domineering tone, and she would lose control of herself, and lay the whip about his shoulders and then——

**CHAOS!!**

He waited wrathfully for an instant, and in that instant out came the fare and another man, who both hurried up to the cab. "Hi, cabby, where have

you got to?" shouted the first comer. "Here you are, Earl's Court station."

Marion drove away gladly, leaving the policeman staring stupidly after them, and as she went she yelled back at him the most opprobrious epithet she could possibly imagine, which happened to be :

"You brutal bully!"

He stared at this wholly unexpected verbal missile, but so much astonishment was mingled with his stupidity that her temper vanished, and she burst into such a fit of laughing she had much ado to keep her seat. Then she gently raised the trap and heard Number 1 say : "Gentleman certainly. Often heard of 'em, never met one. Bet Charlie Schaffers a quid that I never should. Sha'n't tell against myself. Ha! ha!"

She listened no more.

When they got out one of them gave her half a crown without remark.

She intended now to go back to the Cromwell Road ; but she was intercepted by a lady and gentleman, who had just come out of Earl's Court station and who caught her before she turned away. They gave her an address in Linden Gardens. It was the first private address she had had that night, and luckily the place was familiar to her, because a friend of hers lived there. She had no option but to accept the job, though she feared the little horse must be tired ; but she had no idea of the trotting capabilities of a cab-horse : he went quite willingly without requiring any whip, and showed no signs of flagging, even up the steep hill in Church Street, Kensington. On arrival at the house the man gave her one-and-six, and she turned back to walk down to the Cromwell Road again.

The streets were now very quiet, and she arrived at the Cromwell Road without hindrance. The

fracas with the policeman had revived her spirits, and she had no intention of going in yet, but she was afraid that if she went to the house to tell Philip so he would not want her to go on, therefore she decided to write a note and leave it for him. Accordingly she drew up by the side of the road in the darkest place she could find, and getting down adjusted her horse's nose-bag, petting him gently as she did so; yet even in this small matter she felt she might be infringing some cab law. Was she permitted to feed her horse by the side of the road? While she was doubting two men passed talking earnestly, and took no heed of her, therefore she judged it must be all right. Then she wrote her note in pencil:—

"Best fun I ever had in my life. Don't expect me home yet awhile. Called a policeman a brutal bully—you should have seen his face. Am quite safe. By the way, is it allowable by the rules of the game to give the horse his supper anywhere by the side of the road? Have made eight shillings and six-pence.

"Your most flighty COUSIN."

Then she sat most comfortably on her dickey while the horse enjoyed himself. She felt as if she had been a cab-driver all her life. After resting for fully half an hour she took off the nose-bag and rug and kissed her horse's nose, a proceeding he accepted with the same meek stolidity with which he faced motor-cars and fire-engines and other phenomena.

Then she went to her own house, rang, and slipped the note in the box, driving away before Clemence had time to answer the door.

She returned eastward, not without unholy thoughts of encountering her friend the policeman by the "Bell and Horns." She let her horse have some water

from the trough at the junction of the Brompton and Cromwell Roads, and as she waited for this purpose another cab drew up beside her, and some one exclaimed, "Blimy, what are ye doing with that keb? Belongs to a mate of mine who has it reg'lar."

She turned quickly, and met the direct gaze of the man she had expected to see.

She was not afraid of him; if the worst came to the worst she could confide in him; anyway, it was rather pleasant to meet some one she knew about.

"Well, he hasn't got it to-night," she retorted.

"Lord, yer a sharp 'un," he answered, in sarcastic admiration. "And such a young 'un too; who'd have thought it? Bin brought up to the business?"

"Let's see," she answered, trying to recall what Philip had told her of Peter's own career. "Driving two years now, was twenty last January—isn't that it?"

He scrutinised her sharply, peering into her face in the dim light. They were standing now beneath the lamp on the island where the roads divide; the wide open space on either side was very silent.

"Say now, thet keb's got a mō-nopoly of the aristocrats," quoth Peter gravely. "Do you happen to know my man?"

"You haven't told me his name yet."

"Blest if I know it myself. He's a big 'un, with light hair, and he wears the airs of a bloomin' dook, and holds himself so." And he gave such an exact imitation of the set of Philip's elbows that Marion burst into a fit of laughter, which she had difficulty in rendering noiseless.

"We calls him Lord Adolphus on the rank," he went on. "Not without I know his baptismal name ain't Adolphus, but the two runs together natural; what's amosin' you?"

Philip had not told her these particulars; she entered heartily into the spirit of the thing, and

tried to extract some further information on the subject.

"Well, I believe I've seen him," she said. "Rather proud, isn't he? Bad-tempered chap?"

"Ye're having a game with me," he said suspiciously. "I believe you've got something to do with him. Why is he off to-night? Been a bad boy, perhaps? Been taking electric soup?"

Marion had never heard the expression before, but she gathered the meaning instantly. "No, I don't think it's that," she said, inwardly choking with suppressed laughter. "Is he given that way?"

"Well, I can't say as ever I caught him at it," said Peter judicially, "but those straight chaps are always the worst; when they go on the bust, they're first class at it; as for me, I've always been a bad lot, so I don't need to keep up my character that way."

In token of amity she held out her cigarette-case. "Thanks, same to you," he said, taking two cigarettes. "I wouldn't mind the case and all, it's a rare 'un."

Marion felt very much inclined to tell him to keep it, as he handled it with admiration, but prudential reasons forbade it.

"Give me a cigarette or cigar, and I ask no better," he continued, as he passed it back. "You feel like a lord toolin' along with one of them last; but a pipe, oh no"—in accents of pretended disgust. "Nasty dy-irty things, not fit for a woman's lips. I heard a gal say that one day, she didn't mean the pipe though, so I thought I'd let the briar alone for the future. Say, are you goin'?"

Marion nodded, moving on.

"I'm coming too. Where are ye off to?"

"I'm new at this job—where should I go?"

"Why, you said just now you'd been driving for two years."

"I didn't say a night-cab."

"Oh, in the daytime. Well, I'm going for one of

them night-clubs; it'll be a quarter after one now, and we can get through the Circus and go up Regent Street. Know the 'Dalmatians'?"

"Yes."

"All right, we'll make for that then, and if we don't get a job between, we'll go alongside."

As they passed the "Bell and Horns" Marion kept a sharp look-out for her friend the policeman, and presently saw him further up than he had been before, by the corner of Beauchamp Place.

When they were nearly abreast of him a cyclist came careering madly down on the wrong side of the road. Marion happened to be a little in advance.

"Look out," she yelled in her natural voice to Curtis, as she swerved to one side to avoid a collision. The cyclist tried to dodge between the wheels of the two cabs, lost his balance, and fell smash into Marion's near wheel, which was at right angles to him, as she had pulled half across the road to give him room. He picked himself up in a moment unhurt, and cursed loudly at the damage to his machine.

Full of importance, the policeman strode across the road.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, recognising Marion. "You sha'n't get off so easy this time, there's something queer about you."

A wild medley of thoughts rushed through her brain. He would investigate, would haul her off to the police-station; and even if she could prove her complete innocence in the matter of the cyclist, she was not in a position to bear the scrutiny of the law. Until the advent of the policeman Curtis had been happily engaged in an antiphon with the cyclist; but now as the guardian of the law stooped down to examine the broken machine he looked across at Marion, with a whimsical expression, and framed with his mouth the words "Cut and run."

Marion was facing directly into Beauchamp Place,

and almost before he said the words she realised that her only chance lay in flight. With a sudden impulse she brought the whip over the good little horse's loins, and it started forward with a wild spring into the black depths of Beauchamp Place. Such a movement had been totally unexpected ; it would, of course, have been fatal to an ordinary cabman, liable to be recognised any day, and knowing this the policeman had never contemplated its possibility. He sprang erect, aghast at the audacity of the proceeding, and shrieked to earth and air to stop the runaway. There were very few vehicles about, however, to respond to the appeal, and those there were were mostly occupied.

" Here, get in, we'll catch him," said Curtis reassuringly.

The enraged policeman followed the advice, and they galloped down Beauchamp Place. Concluding that his new-found friend would have the sense to turn into the less frequented district westward, at the end of the street, Curtis pursued steadily an inoffensive cab turning eastward into Pont Street. This on being overtaken showed an innocent and aggrieved driver.

Meantime Marion, having careered wildly round one or two squares and ovals, with a lamentable scarcity of outlets, found herself turning into Sloane Square, and discovered that she was safe from pursuit. She had really been a little bit frightened by this last episode, but with immunity came boldness, and she thought she would just go through now to the end of the night. She therefore made her way to the " Dalmatians " in Oxford Street, hoping to find Curtis there, and to hear that he also had safely emerged from the affair. She found a line of cabs waiting about outside, and stood at the end for some time looking out sharply for Curtis ; but, seeing him not, a new impulse seized her, and she turned away in the direction of Regent Street ; she was feeling tired and thought she would go home.



About midway down two men came quickly out of a side street from the direction of Soho. They stood under a lamp-post, and one of them signed to Marion to wait, so she drew up resignedly beside them.

"Give me the right time," said one, pulling out his watch.

"It's not two yet," replied his companion. "What time does the express leave?"

"Two-twenty-five—plenty of time. You'll manage that for me then?"

He got into the cab, and the man left behind shouted the direction, "Waterloo, Main Line," and Marion began the last of her night's adventures, and the one which affected her the most nearly, for the man she was taking to Waterloo was Archie, and Archie was supposed to be in Paris. There might, of course, be some reasonable explanation. He might have been called back in the way of business; but if so why was he off by rail to Southampton—obviously Southampton—at this time? And a great distrust of his visits to Southampton rose up in Marion's mind. He pushed up the trap. "You'll be there by two-twenty, cabby?" he asked.

It was so extraordinary to hear his well-known voice and realise their respective positions that she expected to wake up suddenly, and find this one of the many dreams she had had in the past week anticipating the adventure. It was very silent now in the streets, only an occasional hansom passed, and the steady beat, beat of her horse's hoofs and the twinkle of the bell alone accompanied her. Her high spirits had evaporated; she felt as one might suppose a kitten to feel when it has been dashing about in exuberant frolic and has suddenly come with a painful crack against a stone wall. She had come with awful suddenness against a wall of hard fact.

As they passed over Waterloo Bridge the lights

shining in the water beat back a painful sadness, echoing her mood, and the great army of those who had been unable to find an answer to the enigma of life, and had plunged into the water, preferring to face an unknown future in all its darkness rather than continue in the torture of known misery, seemed to rise up and wave to her, a hideous band, not of airy phantasms, but of bony frames, which dragged with them the green slime and unutterable filth of the moaning river's bed. Marion shuddered.

She clattered through the dark tunnel at Waterloo, and went up the incline mechanically. When Archie got out he felt in his pockets for a florin, which he found and handed to her ; but, as he glanced at her, he stopped abruptly, and looked more earnestly. She turned away. He went on a few steps, and wheeled round again, watching her intently as she drove away down the incline.

She had no desire now save to get home, home to think, to push away noisome suggestions which crowded in upon her. Of course Archie had a right to be there if he chose, there would probably be some simple solution ; yet as she went back by Westminster Bridge, letting the reins hang loosely and her tired horse go at his own pace, the words of the Psalm perpetually rang in her ears :

"But it was even thou, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted."

Did Philip know of some fact in Archie's life which was hidden from all the rest of the world ? Was that the reason for his hatred ? She had not answered the question to her own satisfaction when she arrived at Lexham Gardens. Philip appeared instantly in answer to her summons.

"I never spent such a long evening in my life," he said. "You've had plenty of it."

"It was splendid," she answered. "All the first part. I'll tell you about it whenever you will come

round. I can't stand talking here. And at the end——"

"No accident?" he asked hastily, noting her tired tone.

"Oh no, no, nothing of that sort, it's only that I have just seen Archie."

"Ah!" he said, in a voice of comprehension.

He climbed into his seat and gathered up the reins.

"Philip, I want to know, is there something underhand about Archie, something you know?"

"I'm afraid, Miriam, I'm not a good person to ask; if you want to know anything of that sort, why not ask Archie himself?"

"You are quite right, yes," she said submissively. "Good-night, Philip."

## CHAPTER XII.

### *A CANDID CONFESSION.*

"Each man's mind is a different prism  
With angles of thought and stains of sin."

W. B. R.

MARION awoke the next morning in a chaotic state of mind. The feeling that at first overbalanced all the others was her own tiredness; she was suffering severely from stiffness, and yet she had not felt unduly overdone the night before; doubtless excitement had kept her up. She went over her various adventures, chuckling at the remembrance of some, saddened by that which had been the concluding one. There was enough matter here to keep her pondering during the whole day. .

Philip did not turn up until the morrow, and she greeted him warmly.

"You have given me an experience worth all the experiences, save one, that I ever had in my life," said she, "and I do appreciate it, for it wasn't easy for you to do, and I know that; but I am really grateful, Philip."

"I want to hear all about it," he said, smiling at her earnest face. "But first I have something to tell you. I saw Peter last night and heard of your adventure with him; of course he has no notion you are a woman, but he guessed you were no real cabby, and I gave him to understand you were a pal of mine."

"See," she said, taking up her silver cigarette-case, "I owe him something for his prompt advice, and the way he covered my retreat. I want you to give him that."

Philip handled it doubtfully.

"It has no monogram nor distinguishing mark," she continued. "Don't you think he might have it?"

"Yes, I think he may have that," said Philip; "he'd value it immensely, and he's a decent fellow. I was afraid at first when I heard of your flight that the policeman might have got the number of your back plate, and come down on me during the night in consequence; but Peter says that is quite impossible, he couldn't have seen it himself in the bad light, and the bobby certainly didn't, so we're safe there."

"That's all right," said Marion, "and the whole thing has gone off perfectly; but—I forgot, I have something to give you, a lot of money, see, thirty shillings at least!" Indicating a carefully arranged pile of silver, "Twenty-nine and sixpence," she added, counting it out, and flattering herself on the master stroke of policy shown in the odd amount. "What a pity it wasn't just the thirty!"

As Philip did not speak she looked up, and found him smiling benignly. "Clever cabby," he said satirically. "Sorry I can't believe you, I would if I could. You shouldn't have made it so much."

In spite of all her endeavours to look innocent Marion burst out laughing; but yet her woman's brain was sharper than his, and she found means eventually to give it to him without his knowledge.

She told her tale through at last, and Philip listened eagerly to every detail, laughing heartily at her daring, applauding her spirit. He knew so well all the routes and places named that he could follow word by word, and to him this familiar tale was more interesting than any story of the unknown; and

thus it is with all of us, because our brain artist illustrates more graphically the known than the unknown. Marion recounted her meeting with Archie, when she came to it, without comment, but when at last Philip rose to go she said :

"I am sending a note to Archie asking him to come here on Sunday afternoon." Their eyes met, and though he said nothing she knew that he was glad she had discovered for herself the doubleness that lay beneath his brother's plausible life.

On Sunday afternoon Marion felt unexpectedly nervous ; she had gathered from Philip's silence that there would be no natural and straightforward explanation of Archie's movements such as she longed to hear, and she felt as if a thundercloud hung over her. Archie came in pleasantly and without embarrassment.

"How are you ? Very glad to find your note when I got in, but of course in any case I should have come round to see how you were."

She greeted him with constraint, and with none of her usual vivacity. "When did you return from Paris?" she asked abruptly.

"My dear girl! You ask with the air of an inquisitor. You may be at rest, you are the first person I have been to see since I arrived in Town." The evasion was palpable.

It was terribly hard to arraign Archie, to put upon his defence one who had always stood in the position of counsellor and adviser ; yet with Marion's nature no half-measures were possible, she could not submit to a half-defined barrier of distrust between herself and one of those who formed her Inner Circle. The doubt must be openly advanced in words, to be dispelled if possible, at all events to be known and reckoned with, so she came straight to the point.

"I saw you in Town on Wednesday night."

He turned upon her sharply, and various incidents

floating in his brain fitted together as the pieces of a puzzle.

"Then it was you," he said, without perceptible hesitation, "and you were driving Philip's cab. The next escapade is an accomplished fact."

"I have not the least right to question you, Archie," she said wearily, "and your motives may be perfectly legitimate, but when one knows a person very intimately, and suspicious circumstances arise, it is best to state them openly."

"You have every right to question me," he said, a trifle doggedly.

"I can't help feeling," she continued, rather confusedly, for his demeanour was not that of a culprit, "that there is something wrong, something in your life of which I have never heard."

"Philip has been enlightening you, I suppose?"

"Indeed he has not," she answered with a touch of her usual fire. "He has never said one word against you, but the fact of the enmity between you speaks for itself. By the way, how did you know Philip was driving a cab?"

"Philip and I have encountered one another," he said sententiously.

There was a silence, compounded of embarrassment on Marion's part, and of assumed indifference on his. He spoke first.

"You have not asked me any questions yet," he said.

"Because I have no right to be inquisitorial." Then with a touch of feminine inconsistency she added, "But I do want to know why you make a mystery of returning from Paris sooner than you intended; why you were in London without your friends knowing; what on earth you were doing in Regent Street at that time of night, and why you were going to Southampton—always Southampton, Archie."

"One at a time, if I can remember them," he said

imperturbably. "Firstly, I did not return from Paris sooner than I intended ; secondly, I did not tell my friends I had returned until I meant to go to see them ; thirdly, I had been at a gaming club in Soho, a thing I must add I very rarely do ; fourthly, it is 'always Southampton' because the lady who passes as my wife lives there."

The stupefaction which seized Marion on hearing these last words rendered her quite dumb and still. A moral earthquake had occurred, and the world reeled. Archie, of all people, frequenting gaming clubs was bad enough ; but the other thing ! The upright Archie ! Now if it had been Philip the matter would have been more intelligible. Besides, Archie had asked her to marry him a few months ago. The sense of insult flooded hotly and suffocatingly around her she was drowning, drowning in a sea of bewilderment and pain. But this stranger, this man whom she had never known, was speaking evenly and calmly.

"I am known down there as Mr. Travis, she is Mrs. Travis. I have not seen much of her in the last year—in fact, not at all until some six weeks ago. She is, however, a quiet, patient soul, and these little omissions do not trouble her as they would a woman of your temperament."

His quiet manner, his acknowledgment of the situation without apology, stunned the flood of perturbation in Marion, and she thought she must have misunderstood him. With a strong effort to secure self-control she rose and went to the window, standing there with her back to him, tapping aimlessly on the glass with her finger-tips until she had recovered herself a little ; but her voice was broken and pitiful as she asked :

"Archie, it is not true ? Not having much knowledge of the world I have misunderstood you ?"

He too was silent for a moment, and his voice



though still evenly modulated was a little more forced as he answered, "It is quite true."

"And yet—yet you ——" She could say no more; but her fingers played aimlessly with the blind cord, she did not know what she was doing.

"Yet I make no apology? Is that it? No. What's the use of apology? I will tell you anything you like. When I go too far stop me by a sign. I didn't come here to make a defence, but because you told me to come. You were bound to know sooner or later as Philip knew, and it's better to make a clean breast of it myself. I have known her for a long time, since I was at college. I was engaged to her then; she was six years older than me, and not quite of the class that my people would like me to marry, so it was all kept perfectly secret. Her mother made the match. I was not always the calm self-contained person you know now. The woman, the mother, influenced me by a word here and a hint there, until I veritably believed I was in love with the daughter. The mother died. Our engagement had become more and more distasteful to me, yet it seemed bad to break it off then; Maggie was not left utterly destitute, she had a little, but she was poor. However, it had to be done, one can't ruin one's life for a scruple, and I offered her a sum of money to release me. I didn't put it like that, of course, but that's what it amounted to. I felt a cur to break it off then, but still such a thing has been done before by other men, and fire and brimstone have not descended from heaven. The very faint attraction she held for me was not sufficient excuse for marriage, I did not care for any other woman, but I wished the connection to end. She did not. There it was. She cared sufficiently for me to cling to me without marriage, I did not care enough for her to bind myself by marriage. The inevitable consequence ensued. So it has been."

"How long?" Marion asked, in a choked voice.

"Twenty years or so."

"And no one of your friends has known?"

"There has not been much difficulty about that. Until recently I have seen her on an average about once a year for the last ten years. There are some women whose minds are bounded by the four walls of a house."

"And you—" she said, "you dared——"

"Ah, Marion," he broke out suddenly, "don't think of that. I know it, I know what a hound I was. But you were crying when I came in—I had never seen you cry before. You have been all the world to me for years and years, but, believe me, scoundrel as I am, I never meant to speak, it carried me off my feet; as I spoke I knew it was impossible, that this would rise up between us, but I knew also you would never have me, and it was such a relief to tell you. It's all over now. If I could, I would wash it off your memory; but I can't, and it's done."

A real physical pain gripped Marion's heart, she felt strangely lethargic, and wished that she could lose consciousness. Nothing could ever be the same again, she could believe in no man; he, Archie, her cousin and adviser, had lived this double life for years and years, even before she had known him.

The words of La Fontaine rose to her lips, and she spoke them aloud in the bitterest irony:

"Qu'un ami véritable est une douce chose."

He bit his lip tightly, but did not speak. And then she looked at him with a dumb face of misery out of which all rage had died. "You have killed something in me which can never live again," she said hopelessly; "I am all numb and dead."

"Marion," he said softly, "I don't say it to excuse myself, but to help you—one doesn't do these things deliberately, but one slips into them. The world is not made up of flat planes so that a man drops

from one to another, but is an inchoate mass, and one rolls along with no break, a little higher or lower. If I had known all this beforehand, what I should do to you, how I should act, don't you know that I would far sooner have put a bullet in my brain?"

"But it is done, and can never be mended."

"Shall I go?"

"Yes, when you have promised me something."

"What?" he asked, a little startled.

"Marry that woman!"

There was a dead silence, the silence of a concentrated effort. Once he opened his lips to expostulate, but said nothing, then he took up his hat. Marion did not turn, nor look at him. He paused on his way to the door, and as he went out said, with irony: "If there is any other trifle you would like me to do, you have only to let me know."

She sat rigid and motionless, and Clemence, finding her so, would have sent for a doctor, but Marion forbade her, laughed a little, dressed and went out as usual; her lips talked glibly, but her heart was dumb.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *A COAL-CUTTING MACHINE.*

"Then a terrible thing began ; a Titanic drama—a combat of matter against mind, the duel of the lifeless and the living,—on the one side was mind, on the other brute force."

VICTOR HUGO (*trans.*).

THE whirring wheels in connection with the cages in the shaft of the Duntail colliery in North Miningshire ran round and round so fast that they seemed to flicker and reel in the dizziness of eye which they created. The engines groaned and bumped, the great lever sawed up and down solemnly, like the arm of an exhorting minister ; at intervals the shrill tinkle of a bell, which warned the man in the engine-house to slow down his engines, upset all these arrangements, but after a period they began again, the wheels to whirl, the engine to groan, the lever to exhort, while the rope, compact of many wire strands, ran out its slow length into the depth of the earth, carrying with it a cageful of officials. When the last of these had disappeared the place was singularly quiet, for it was the day known among the miners as "pay Saturday"—that is to say, the men had been paid their wages on Friday, the preceding day, and did no work on Saturday.

The black woodwork that rose like a mighty scaffolding ; the tall chimneys, the coal-trucks, and the heaps of cinders, lay depressingly on the sight ; yet withal the fascination of a mighty human

industry permeated the place, the atmosphere was pregnant with all the thrill and force of a thousand phantoms, swift messengers wrought in iron and steel, boiling and hissing over the surface of the earth to the remotest quarters of England's great empire, driven by the latent force here disembowelled from its hiding-place. Presently the silence was broken by the appearance of a party of men, in all perhaps a dozen, who came along the single line of railway and mounted the steps to the shed above the ground-level. They were obviously not miners; on the contrary, they had the prosperous appearance of business men, though several of them were somewhat comically disguised by the stiff pitman's tarpaulin, resembling a sou'wester, and one or two wore the official blue serge suit familiar to colliery overmen. Among the latter was Mr. Pierson, who was conversing easily with a small, wiry man, keen as a fox terrier, who might have been any age between forty and sixty.

"Now then, gentlemen, here you are," said the overman of the colliery, who was one of the party. "Eight of you in this lot."

"Quite right, Redman," said Pierson, "you go down this time and I'll follow with the rest." He laid his large hand as he spoke with a restraining motion on the arm of the smaller man beside him, and they waited thus, a sufficient contrast in height and bulk, as the overman gave the signal and the first party was swiftly and smoothly lowered out of sight.

"We shall have a fight for it, you think then, Beresford?" asked Pierson, with the light of battle gleaming in his eyes.

Beresford smiled. "If you're spoiling for a fight I don't mind prophesying you'll be gratified, especially after what young Talfourd told me."

"Did Talfourd say how his father was?"

"No, but it's nothing serious; only a slight chill, I fancy."

"Talfourd is not a delicate man, and he is in the prime of life."

"That's just it, Pierson ; if he *does* go, we have no one ready to take his place."

Pierson remained silent.

"Have you ever considered the possibility of standing in the Conservative-Unionist interest yourself, Pierson?" Beresford asked.

"I? No. It's your busy idlers, or idle busybodies who want their work made for them in Parliament."

"The other side have worked up the constituency steadily, and would bring Pitt forward again in the event of a bye-election. Did you ever meet him? He married a Miss Danville of this neighbourhood, though he is not a local man. The last election was hardly a fair test, for it was going to be a three-cornered fight, only Alsop, the pitmen's member, died a week before it came off, and the pitmen had no chance ; they would not vote for Pitt, and were therefore practically disfranchised for the time, and honest men had a chance. We sha'n't have the luck to get such a snapshot again, it's a shocking Radical neighbourhood."

"Who is the nominee of the miners' party now?"

"There's no one in particular, though I believe a checkweigh-man named Garthwaite is first favourite ; still he's by no means a universal favourite."

"Well, there's plenty of time to consider all the rest when you want a Conservative candidate again ; at present you couldn't have a better man than the one you've got."

A dim draughtiness, a cold smell of tar and oil, a rushing of air and a confused murmur of indefinite noise greeted the remaining members of the party as they alighted from the cage at the foot of the shaft.

They found the others waiting for them in the

overman's cabin. Pierson was the last to be provided with a lamp, and as he took it from the bent and worn old pitman who sat there he greeted him pleasantly.

"Hoo, Tom man, I didn't expect to see thee here; still flourishing? That's all right."

The man's face lit up until it was transformed, and he thrust out a dirty hand with unconscious familiarity.

"Thoo minds ma then? And I've often thought on tha'; and hoo beest thoo? Eh, mon, I never sets eyes on tha' but I call'st to mind thy feyther; he was a grond mon, was that, he and me sarved together as marrows for half a score of years."

"Why aren't you out for a holiday?"

"Here I'll stay voie like till they fetches ma oot feet forrard."

Pierson slipped something into his hand and quickly followed his friends.

The passages, wide at first, grew narrower as the workings were penetrated; the sensation to any one unaccustomed to it would have been nightmare like; the sepulchral gloom, the strange draught, the black walls, and the little glow-worm lamps which, in the words of a well-known paradox only gave their bearers "light enough to see the darkness," combined to produce a sensation of unreality. The height of the roof varied considerably, and between the uneven sleepers of the tram lines were miniature pits of mud and water; however, there was no startling cry of "'ware tubs," to-day to add to the abounding dangers, the place was as deserted as the catacombs.

Though Mr. Pierson had spent an appreciable part of his time underground in similar scenes, he could never pass through a pit again after an interval without recalling those far-off days when he had been employed in a pit as a "trapper" or "trap-door" boy, engaged to stand behind a door and pull it

open when he heard the trams coming. He had not been allowed a light, the hours of work were limited only by his powers of endurance ; ventilation was in its infancy. At times the sweat had run down his grimy little face, and he had gasped as if he were on the point of suffocation, and at other times, having tramped from his home a couple of miles off in the driving sleet and mud of a winter's morning, he had arrived chilled to the bone, and the noisome stench of slowly drying clothes had enveloped him all day. He had eaten food gritty with coal dust, and he had drunk cold tea impregnated with the taste of coal and tar which saturated the air ; yet in the immense gloom of a lifelong tunnel of blackness, punctuated only by the passing of trams, his big brain had slowly grown. At first it had moved dimly with thoughts too wide for grasp, but had developed through years until the chaotic shapes had started into clearness, with apparent details, and become actual things, transmuted from the visionary dreams of a boy's mind into swiftly moving engines and machines, alive in their beauty and strength.

His earliest days up to the age of six had been passed amid natural things, he had lived surrounded by the growth of animal and vegetable life, yet some fibre in him vibrated in unison with the roar of machinery. The overpowering domination of the pit had gripped him directly he came within its sphere of influence. His time had come, mercifully, after the law of 1842-3, which forbade the employment of boys below ten years of age underground ; but long before he had passed the age limit he had been drawn as by a magnet to the towering outworks, and had stood there for hours gazing in awe and delight. He had never feared the blackness as some boys did, and even the first time he made the descent, when a man had, in the dialect of the north, "clicked him" under the armpits, and thrusting one leg into a bucket had



held him carelessly swinging over void space as they went down, he had known no fear, only a strong sensation of awed wonder.

When his companions, worn out with weary hours, had staggered home to bed, young Pierson, thinking, ever thinking, had carried out in scanty hours snatched from sleep the ideas he had pondered over during the gloomy day. The other lads came above ground only to eat and sleep, and in winter never saw the sun from week to week, because on their one free day they "slept the clock round"; but Sundays were Pierson's days of experiment and research, the fruition of a week's thought. He was a born mechanician, and he combined with inventive genius that deliberate perseverance and inexhaustible vital energy that is the foundation stone of success.

Education was at that date for the few; but Pierson senior had been a man of uncommon ability, who had taught his boy himself, and exacted from him, ruthlessly, tasks far beyond his age, a claim to which the lad had responded strenuously. The father and son had both earned a reputation for cleverness, which had stood the latter in good stead as a protection against the brutal bullying that went on underground. The big lads, hulking young ruffians, promoted to be "putters"—a term which at that time meant they had to drag the trams themselves from the workings to the wider roads—were little better than brutes, and tyrannised over the smaller lads without mercy. More especially was this the case when two boys of unequal sizes were set to work together: a couple of this sort were named "headsman" and "foal," and it happened that the poor little "foal" had often to do far more than his share, though he only received one-third of the pay. Pierson's big limbs and great strength had made him respected as well as his reputation for cleverness, and as it happened he had never undergone the awful ex-

perience of "foal," though he had been a "half-marrow" with another boy of his own size. He had not had very much of this either, for at the age of sixteen he had made a suggestion which had been taken up by the overman and had been finally carried into effect by the manager ; and though the lad received nothing directly for it, it led to his advancement, for several colliery owners took up the matter, and made inquiries by which the young inventor was brought forward. By their help he was enabled to attend lectures in the neighbouring town. The boy seemed to have been especially endowed by Providence with those qualities which lead to a speedy rise in life, for in addition to his practical cleverness he possessed a great personal attraction of manner, which made him remembered by all those who had once noticed him. At the age of eighteen he had left off pit-work altogether, and was living, with the strictest economy, in the town in one room of his own, where he did not only the necessary domestic housework for himself, but his own cooking. Immersed in a sea of books, receiving private help and tuition gratis from many who had felt the fascination of his great power, he slowly forged ahead. The circle widened, those who had been came again, and told others of him ; and in that bare, uncarpeted room the uncouth lad, with his large head and leg-of-mutton hands, held many earnest discussions far into the night with men who had already made their mark.

Genius leaps over what are insuperable barriers to the commonplace. Pierson had set his heart on going to college ; in vain those who saw sheer waste of time in such a proceeding attempted to argue him out of his scheme—the keynote of his character was imperviousness to outside influence, never had word or action of another deflected by one inch the current of his career. He had decided within himself that mere monetary success without social adaptability could

bring nothing but unhappiness. He had absorbed to a certain extent the manners and habits of the class above him, but he wanted more than that. He was no mere money grubber nor dry-as-dust inventor, the joyousness of life rose strongly within him, his hard unsparing life and intense application was a means to an end, not the end itself; it was necessary because he had started so far down in the race that if he meant to win he must work while others played. He applied himself to win a mathematical scholarship, and succeeded. To Cambridge University he went. Perhaps the University did not realise all his dreams, he found it possible to be in it, yet not of it; mere brains could force the door but were no genuine passport to entrance. Yet the Cambridge days, too, left their mark on his wonderful nature. Pierson senior, who had saved a little money and invested it judiciously, at this date thought it time to retire from work, and so came up to live in Cambridge while his son was a student. He was a fine-looking man, tall and grave, with a native refinement found in men whose forefathers have for generations lived face to face with nature far from the vulgar vices of towns, and the period of pit life had not roughened him. He lived simply and sparingly, and never allowed the natural pride he felt in his son to appear. The old man had been a widower since Stephen's birth, and while in Cambridge he married a girl who considered herself his superior in station, for she was the only daughter of a well-to-do publican, had been to a boarding-school, and drove her own dog-cart. She also brought him a small fortune.

Young Pierson made no mark at Cambridge, his strength lay in the direction of practical not intellectual achievement; yet he slowly won recognition and his name was known as that of a man who would "do" something eventually. When he left, the discrepancy in his own social attainments still haunted him, and

he went to live with a Mr. and Mrs. Dymock, as paying guest, rather than with his own father and step-mother. Making the Dymocks' house, in a pit district, his headquarters, during the ensuing years he spent a hard apprenticeship, and carried out several small improvements in colliery machinery which he patented. The demand for these was almost instantaneous, and he gained a sufficient footing never to be dependent on any one again. His name and ability were recognised in time, he became known as an expert, his opinion was worth money, his ideas were respected. Both his father and his step-mother died before he was a rich man, leaving him a little step-sister, who, with her small fortune, was wholly in his charge. It was not until she was seventeen that he had her to live with him. By that time his schemes had prospered, his investments had repaid him tenfold, and he had ceased from dogged work. Money makes money, especially if the capital be guided by an unerring judgment. At forty-five Pierson was known by repute, not only in England but abroad, and he was a rich man. It was characteristic of him that his wealth never dominated him, he never allowed anything to dominate him ; in his evenly balanced nature the variety of equal interests, the many sides of life received due attention. Yet the mechanical genius which lay at the root of all was doubtless the strongest motive. Once in his dearly loved colliery with a new invention struggling for outward form, he was deaf and blind to all else ; the love of machinery was in his bones.

The particular invention on trial this afternoon was a new design for a coal-cutting machine, applied to the Long Wall system. Though it was intended chiefly for low and difficult places, and would therefore save much painful labour, it had by no means sprung from pure philanthropy, for its inventor had common sense enough to know that mere philanthropy

without some substantial basis in utility is but a dead weight.

The harder and thinner seams cost more to work, for the men's rate of pay was higher, coal-getting was immeasurably slower. If it were possible once to reduce the expense of working such spots to a common denominator with the best in the pit, the coal-owners would see their way to a wider margin of profit—at all events until it was filched from them by the trades-union's striking for increased wages. It was, however, probable that no union official would be able to look far enough ahead to contemplate this beatific vision with the eyes of faith, and that so soon as the machine was heard of, an attempt would be made to strangle it in its birth, by striking at once.

When the party, under the guidance of the overman, arrived at the spot for operations, they found the deputy overman waiting in charge of the precious machine, which lay gleaming in the light of the lamps like a skeleton of shining steel. The term "Long Wall" working is applied to the system by which a space is cleared parallel with the seam to be cut for a number of yards—perhaps a hundred yards—and into this narrow way open various connecting passages at right angles which are termed "gateways."

It was unavoidable that this invention of Pierson's should resemble, in some details, some of the many coal-cutting machines already in use; but it went further than anything which had yet been designed, in that it did itself a great part of the work heretofore left for the men; not only undercutting the seam, but slicing it vertically with knives into great blocks three feet in width. These blocks, severed on three sides in the seam, were seized by a gigantic pair of pincers resembling ice pincers, and gently detached before being placed upon an endless revolving platform which ran parallel with the "face," and on which

they were carried away into the waiting tubs. The motive power of this new design was electricity.

Many of the men present had been informed beforehand of the main principles of the thing, but had not actually seen it, and they crowded forward in extreme eagerness to see the marvellous invention which had carried the adaptation of mechanical means one step forward, thrusting the human agent, who must ever ultimately remain behind every machine, one step further back.

Pierson explained the points carefully, and answered the questions showered upon him clearly and concisely.

When the verbal explanation was finished, the young overman, familiarly addressed as "Geordie" by his "marrow," put himself in position to work the machine which had been entrusted to him. He spent some little time in adjusting it; but when the electric current was turned on, the tremor of the "current" animated the cold steel. It was as if man had solved the mystery of life, and brought into being a frame in semblance of a skeleton, which now, god-like, he charged with the vital fluid of life.

"It cuts very cleanly," said one of the party.

"It's soft coal here," explained the deputy. "We fettled it up in a good place so's it should work canny at first."

"Soft or not, you wouldn't get 'round' coal of that size any way else," said the overman severely. "We'll go on to the next one, and meantime I'll have the amount of this worked out."

It was not in Pierson's nature to be unduly exalted, yet he would have been less than human had he not felt a certain exultation at the success of this culmination of all his years of thought, at the work of this child of his brain. It was as if he in his own person had thundered against that defying wall and cut it out, out-distancing all records in its ruin. This was the

outcome of many of his minor schemes ; all his perfected inventions seemed to have but led up to this, the one crown of all, combining in itself so many intricacies, so many improvements.'

Silently he followed the others through the narrow roads, not listening to their questions and comments, but lost in a world of his own. Lower and lower were the "gates" they traversed, until at last, bent double, they stumbled along as best they could.

"Much more of this, Pierson?" asked Beresford, who was just ahead.

"About fifty yards, I think."

"I shall be stifled. I'm not born to it like the rest of you."

"Impossible. Why, you're breathing better air here than at the surface, the new fan produces 150,000 cubic feet of air per minute!"

When at length they reached the spot where the second machine was awaiting its trial, they found the roof barely two feet in height, and within this narrow limit the men crouched down prostrate, jammed together in a confused heap. In spite of experience, many of them felt as if they were already in the confines of a grave, and Beresford found himself wonderingly contemplating the conduct of the mourners above at his own funeral. The selection of the place had been made with a view to displaying the utmost capabilities of the machine. One of the overman's sons, a mere lad, was in charge of it, and he made way as the party appeared.

The overman proceeded to arrange matters to his own liking.

"This is a very awkward place," he said. "If it'll work here it'll just work anywhere you like to put it."

Once more the strange skeleton began its oddly human work, once more it cut out the coal as if it were putty. The machine was folded into smaller

compass, various minor adjustments had altered its appearance, but they did not seem to alter its capacity for work, which was displayed if possible more effectively than before.

All the men present had some knowledge of the difficulty with which the human being works in these shallow seams, and they saw now that difficulty and the inseparable strain undertaken by metal, and the human power reserved only for the purpose of guidance, direction, and control. Yet that the trial was not superfluous was shown suddenly and unexpectedly. One huge chunk of coal gave way before the undercutter had passed on, and falling, struck on the outer rail, the cutter was wrenched from the hole, and the machine fell over with force. The current was still connected, and the machinery continued working viciously, strenuously ; but instead of directing its malice against the wall, it directed it against the human beings who had assembled to watch it. It was as if it said in glee, "Come, now, you have made me work, and you shall feel the power of your slave."

The cutter whirled in its endeavours to continue its course, the knives sawed up and down with gimlet-like directness, the great claws jarred upon the hard floor, scraping, banging, clawing, in an awful endeavour to tear the solid stone from its bed. Pell-mell the frightened sightseers scrambled back, jostling each other in their endeavours to get out of reach. One man slipped, and as he struggled to recover himself, his leg shot forward, and gleefully the monster pounced upon it. Down came the hurtling talons, smashing through the bone with a sickening scrunch. An ear-splitting yell from the agonised victim rent the air, his groans were drowned in horrified curses ; where smiling approbation had reigned grim terror held dominion. The claws failed to grip and carry with them the tortured ankle in their upward sweep, and as they poised for a second clutch, the man, who was



incapable of movement, lost all nerve and screamed with the piercing shriek of an agonised child. Pierson was beside him, and never for an instant lost his head ; as the talons paused for a fraction of time at their highest point before returning in a downward sweep, he grasped the broken ankle in both hands, and lifted it out of harm's way, though the hammering claws shaved his own hand in their fearful descent. He and the overman dragged the injured man aside, and leaving him in charge of the others, returned simultaneously to try to arrest the mad machine. The button of the electric connection was now on the far side, and to reach it they must inevitably go within that jarring, tearing, driving circle of trenchant steel, now making the grit and stone fly. There was just room for an arm to pass over or round, outside the flash of knives and the clutch of flesh-tearing pincers, but who could have the nerve to attempt it? The groans of the injured were a warning of the penalty of failure.

"You'd best let it be," said the overman ; "we can cut the connection when we get round."

"Hold your light up," said Pierson suddenly. "It's best stopped, or it will do itself mischief."

He writhed out of his coat, and rolled his shirt-sleeve up to the shoulder. Then to the weird accompaniment of that dreary antiphon, the groans of the injured, the crash of the destroyer, he reached forth above the hungry claws. Slowly and steadily he extended his muscular arm, watching the rise and fall of the pincers beneath. The critical moment was when, having reached sufficiently far, he must drop the hand downward without altering the position of the arm. It was a picture such as would have filled Victor Hugo with delight—man wrestling with the fury of the monster he had created, and which he could not control.

The dim gleam of the lamp shone on the bared

flesh, the shining steel, and showed the group of awed white faces in the gateway. As the expected drop from the wrist took place the arm dropped too, ever so slightly, and the claw, touching it beneath, tore a crimson furrow across the fleshy part, below the elbow. Pierson did not flinch, though his muscles contracted involuntarily, and as a few heavy drops fell upon the blackened floor his longest finger found the button, and silence succeeded uproar.

This had taken but a few seconds in action. Pierson knotted his handkerchief round the wounded part, and passed the ends to the overman to draw tight, before turning to the injured man. He meantime had fainted, and the others were attempting to revive him with a few drops of brandy from a flask, which some one had luckily brought with him.

"Better get him out into the fresh air without delay," said Pierson and they improvised, from a board, a rough cradle for the leg, which had been bound up as well as any one knew how. Redman then took the head and shoulders, and Pierson followed holding the legs of the unconscious victim. Pierson was bent double, holding his burden in his arms as in a sling. He never suggested that any other member of the party should relieve him; indeed, they would, most of them, have been quite incapable of doing so, lacking the physical strength and the ability to walk in that constrained position. Two of them had gone on before for help, and the remainder followed in a wavering tail. Before they emerged into higher roads there was not a member of the party who did not feel he had passed through one of those concentrated experiences, which can only be described as "compressed time," and that he came out years older than he went in. It was naturally, however, Pierson who had suffered most, and the aspect of his face startled those who were used to regard him as a man of iron, against whom the

tribulations of physical suffering that crushed lesser men had no power.

When the poor victim had been safely disposed of into medical hands, Beresford took Pierson by the shoulder. "Get home now," he said, "or we shall have you laid up next."

Pierson was indeed a sight for gods and men. His shirt-sleeve was torn and discoloured from shoulder to wrist. His face appeared in ghastly patches of white, where the perspiration had run down from under his hair in broad channels and washed off the grime.

He reeled slightly when Beresford touched him, but he smiled as he took his advice and turned homeward.

"If," said Beresford tentatively, before he parted from him, "such accidents are to happen——"

"Such accidents must be rendered impossible," said Pierson imperturbably.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *A DISCOVERY.*

"Life is a train of moods."

EMERSON.

GWEN had just returned to Lexham Gardens for the last few days of her holiday. Marion, in greeting her, cast a quick comprehensive glance at her face, and knew something by intuition ; she had not studied the mystery of the human countenance in vain. This particular inference was astonishing in connection with Gwen.

"Sit down there," she said, fumbling at the clasp of her friend's cloak, "and tell me something. Gwen, I didn't know there was a man cousin at the Ridouts."

"There isn't." The answer came with a nervous apprehensive start.

"Who is it then ? Don't try to deceive me ; I have seen that joyous signal flying on a few girls' faces before, and I know what it means. Dear, you are in love !"

"Marion, you are too clever !"

"But tell me, who is it ? Who ? And why did you keep it all to yourself ? Have you just parted from him ?"

"Can't you guess ?"

"How can I ? I have never heard you mention any one."

"But you know him."

"There is no one possible, that we both know—only Mr. Pierson and Philip. Oh, Gwen, it is Philip! You silly girl. He can't possibly marry. Has he said anything to you?"

"I didn't expect sympathy from you, Marion, you never were in love in your whole life or you would know it didn't depend on possible prospects. But I'll tell you all about it. No, I know he can't marry, he has as good as told me so. Of course he has not said anything definite, he's far too honourable, but he cares for me, he loves me, I know it. I am quite satisfied. I have seen him several times while I have been with the Ridouts, and he came to fetch me back here to-day; I have just parted from him."

"With the cab?"

"No, you know he only drives at night; besides, that is such an unsatisfactory way of talking."

"You have tried it evidently. Did he tell you of my driving?"

"Yes, he knew you would tell me yourself. I long to hear about it, Marion, it was just like you."

"But you—" said Marion slowly, "you and Philip! Oh, Gwen, it's too startling."

The combination exasperated her. Of course Gwen had sterling worth; but how could she, plain, badly dressed and at times dull, be sufficient for Philip with all his brightness and fascination? What could he, who was adored by so many women, see in her to attract him? But that Gwen was a sober person, free from conceit and not likely to imagine anything, it might be doubted if he had said what she supposed. It was on the tip of Marion's tongue to say that her cousin was a notorious flirt, but she dismissed that as poisonous. She paced up and down in thought, and the more she thought of the matter the less she liked it. Philip was outrageously susceptible, the very unlikeliness of Gwen might have piqued him into fancying he cared for her; but this imagination would

shrivel in a week, and Gwen's strong, calm affection would last a lifetime to her own sorrow. Gwen herself broke in upon the current of thought.

"Of course," she said practically, "there is no question of marriage at present, perhaps never, that is altogether too visionary; but"—rather shyly—"just at first, you know, the knowledge of love itself is sufficient."

"Is it?" asked Marion, a little bitterly, noting the expression of earnest enthusiasm which overflowed the face before her. "What does it feel like? Tell me. If I am to get my emotions second-hand I may as well have them fresh as stale."

"Marion, I can't tell you, I feel as if I ought to try, but I cannot choose the words as you could. You have never been in love, have you?"

Marion evaded a direct answer. "I once tamed a man," she said, in her most offensive mood, "a big, boisterous brute. When I first met him he was overflowing with self-satisfaction, and he thought all women subordinate to all men; he expected adoration from the inferior sex, and generally obtained it, for he was very masterful, and he was 'heavy cavalry' with a magnificent uniform, you know. When I saw he was inclined to admire me I led him on by all the coquetry I could muster; it wasn't much, but it did for him, he was not perceptive. When he began to like me in earnest I played up to him: he became quite different, humble, rather silent, diffident even with men of his own standing—that was love, I suppose. I should never have imagined he had it in him. He was vastly improved; but, if I had married him, the brute would have come to the surface again, and—well, to be quite frank, he never actually proposed. He had too much conceit still to do that, unless certain of acceptance, and I got tired of the game, and couldn't go on playing my part. But come, that's nothing to do

with you, I only spoke of it as my experience of love in men."

Gwen was silent.

"Come," said Marion, "it's your turn now. What on earth made you fall in love with Philip? You are not susceptible."

"It was love at first sight on my side."

"You believe in that?"

"I do. I think it is the real thing. Long intercourse and much propinquity may originate a feeling which passes for love, and answers the purpose very well; but the proof of its falsity is that almost any girl, and fifty men out of a hundred, would fall in love by this test, and in the other case it is the spirit that instinctively feels the other spirit, for it can have no fact to go upon."

"How sentimental being in love makes the most practical person! It is curious how often that spirit jumps to the conclusion that it has met its fate behind a pretty face."

"You can't call me pretty."

Marion laughed. "You are good, much too good, too serious, too deep for Philip. Yet as I think of it I begin to believe in it a little; you are so totally different, you so strong, so well-principled, he so tolerant and amusing and sensitive. Oh, Gwen, my dear dear Gwen," and she suddenly took her friend's face between her hands and kissed it warmly as she would have kissed a child's, "my heart aches. There is so much ahead that even the rich full power of love cannot combat, such rank grinding poverty, such sordidness, such doubt, how can you ever understand or make allowances for a man of Philip's temperament? Don't expect him to be bound by the same rigorous rules you apply to your own conduct. Don't break your heart in secret over him. Yet, if you get him, you are a lucky girl, he is so dear, so lovable, so many fibred. Oh well, go and take off your things,

or I shall end by making you think I am in love with him myself," and she laughed gaily and brightly.

As Gwen left the room Marion rang the bell for Lu. Silently, in the gathering darkness, before the lamps were lit, Lu crept into the room. Marion put an arm round her neck and drew her close; and so they sat in the dusk, without speaking, and the same weird thoughts were half-unconsciously in the mind of the innocent child and of the perplexed woman; the passion and the poetry and the pain of the world touched them, and enveloped them both in a veil of mystery.



## CHAPTER XV.

### *"I AM A MAN WHO MUST SPEAK."*

"You meet now and then men who have the woman in them without being womanised, . . . and the choicest women are those who yield not a feather of their womanliness for some amount of manlike strength."

G. MEREDITH.

"WHY did you come to bid her good-bye? In order to make sure that the impression was indelible, I suppose, to be certain that it would last long after the very memory of the episode has faded from your mind?"

It was Marion who spoke, sitting at the writing-table in her own study, and Philip who stood before her in amazed annoyance.

"You are in an odious temper," he remarked curtly.

"Well, what I say is true. Why do you want to add that girl's heart to your other trophies, when you know very well you wouldn't marry her if you could?"

"Marion, I won't allow you to speak so; ever since that night of the cab drive there has been a gall of bitterness poisoning you. Because one man is a black sheep, we are not all villains."

"Yet the greater includes the less. Go and make love to her. I sha'n't interfere, she is old enough to take care of herself."

He waited quietly for some minutes. It was very

difficult to disturb Philip's habitually sweet temper ; he liked to be at peace with all men, and he had no intention of leaving his cousin in wrath. When he spoke it was with some hope of influencing her, of dispersing the clouds of cynicism which had lately enveloped her.

"Nothing can ever come of it," he said. "I know that perfectly well, and, low down as I am, I hope I am not such a cad as to bind a girl to an empty future : it would be better for her to forget me altogether. Yet I couldn't help coming in on the chance of seeing her casually. You've sometimes told me I'm a weak fool, or if not, at all events, you've implied it ; well, I know my own weakness so far that I won't say good-bye to her alone. If you'll come into the drawing-room too, and have tea in, and so on, I can get through, but if not, I won't see her."

Though it was a characteristically rambling statement, Marion understood the appeal perfectly. Yet she was possessed by a devil which he had not exorcised.

"I shall not go into the drawing-room ; I have told her you are here, she will be down in a few minutes waiting for you. It would hardly be courteous to sneak away and leave her there."

"D—— Archie!" said Philip, with sudden violence. "You must have cared a great deal for him for that affair to have changed you so entirely."

"I am not in the least changed. I merely see things as they are. There is no use in influence, in words, in deeds ; other people must go their own way ; why should I put myself to personal inconvenience to try to save them? Besides, the sooner we all learn the frailty of human nature the better for us. You may be the one to shatter Gwen's ideal. I give you my blessing, it is a good work. Your brother did the same for me."

He made a further appeal.

"I am not going to tell her anything to disturb her peace of mind, and I am not going to cease caring for her ; your words imply both in sequence. Yes, in earnest, as much in earnest as ever I was in my life, I tell you I care for Gwen. She makes me see how poor and mean and objectless my existence has always been. All these years I have wasted I might have been working up to her. She is so pure, and so straight, so strong. There is something almost awful about it. You may think me a fool—I couldn't say it to any one else—she is almost holy. I have been in love before, or fancied it often, but not like this: the others were awfully nice girls, and I would have gone any distance to see them, but I could laugh at the thought of it now. I am perfectly changed. When I look at her brave little face with its fearless eyes——"

Marion made a gesture to him to be silent. They could hear a movement in the next room. She looked up at him with a bitter curve on her lips that he had never seen there before. "Now's your chance," she said ; "go and tell her all that you've told to me so nicely. I'm sure she'll be your guardian angel, standing at the top of Jacob's ladder and beckoning all the time you are across the sea. That will help you so much—go to her."

He came across the room, and held her wrists strongly. He almost shook her. "For God's sake, Miriam," he said, "don't give way to this heathenish mood, you who can be so tender, so sympathetic, so helpful !"

She let her head rest on her arm, so that it almost touched his hand.

"Ah," he went on, "come with me, be my safeguard against my own weakness, as you have often been. I daren't go alone, I'm a fellow who must speak——"

"Go away then," she said, without looking up.

He relaxed his hold, and waited ; then he made a last effort. He said gently, "Miriam, come." She only shook her head, and the next minute she heard the door between the rooms open and close again—he had gone to say good-bye to Gwen alone.

The yearning appeal in his tone, "Miriam, come," the vibrating desire to be saved from himself, his very knowledge of his own weakness, had pierced her to the core, but her obstinacy could not break up in a moment. When she was alone she raised her head, and her eyes were full of tears: she cried none the less bitterly because it was so quietly, and in the seldom shed tears, the pent-up agony of a broken faith found vent, and the exceeding sting of Archie's duplicity and rottenness was washed away. She sat there in intolerable wretchedness for the best part of an hour, and when the door softly opened again she hid her face, and remained sitting in the same attitude in which Philip had left her.

He came across to her, and laid his hand with almost a caressing movement on her shoulder. "It is perhaps better," he said, with the echoes of the world of emotion he had just quitted still ringing in his tone. "I didn't know, how could I guess that she cared so much? We are not bound to each other in any way, and, as I sail at the end of the month, I shall not see her again ; yet I, weak fool of a fellow, who have never done anything in the past, mean to do something in the future. Marion, take care of her: she is not an ordinary girl, to wear her feelings on her lips, but she is very fond of you."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *LU'S FATE.*

"We crave a sense of reality though it come in strokes of pain."  
EMERSON.

PHILIP sailed for his new life at the Cape at the end of February, and a week later Marion went to the south of France for a month. She made no attempt now to disguise from herself that the lot of all women on earth had overtaken her, and she loved. At first, after the moral shock of Archie's baseness, she had been flung into a bitter whirlpool of despair. If he, Archie, her almost brother, her intimate friend of ten years, could have lived a double life, and successfully concealed this monstrous sin, in whom could she trust? The man she loved was far Archie's superior in brain power, and consequently his success in hypocrisy might be correspondingly greater. He had thrown dust into the eyes of the world, yet even so, his villainies had peeped out. There was an old adage about no smoke without fire—what fire lay behind the vague reports of evil doing attributed to him? These stories, read in the light of the Archie revelation, turned to damning evidence. It was not Archie only who had mentioned them, Aunt Augusta had tacitly admitted that she knew of them, and though she dismissed them as lies, what evidence was that? Marion thought sadly that many women had loved unworthy objects before, and who was she to be exempt? The only

hardship lay in the fact that she had given without being able to take again ; she was of those who stake their all on one throw of the dice, and make no secret reservations in favour of the chances of the next deal.

But as the weeks had passed, and she had heard no more of the man who had wrought so great a revolution in her life, she had fallen into a state of apathy ; and this lasted, even when she returned to London. Nothing interested her, the sights and sounds of the world fell on senses deadened as if wrapped in cotton-wool. She did everything as she was accustomed to do it, but the heart had gone out of her, she was but a galvanised automaton. To talk was an effort, those who spoke to her were far away. She brought her attention back to them spasmodically. Oddly enough this apathy seemed as though it would extend to the very man who was its cause ; she fancied that, even if she saw him again, she would be dead and soulless with him also, his presence would fail to rouse her. Her friends had quickly noticed the change in her ; some attributed it to pride. "Miss Halsted is growing quite unbearable, she will hardly condescend to speak to any one now," said Mrs. Cameron one day. Stanley, who, boylike, set down her quietude to ill-health, was in terrible distress and tried in his boyish way to offer sympathy and advice ; but she only smiled at him, and said she was growing old, and had left the spirits of girlhood behind her for ever.

One morning, soon after her return to London, she was busy with the duties of correspondence, answering mechanically a dozen notes which were "immediate," and tearing up the same number of circulars advising investments, when her cook, Mrs. Dyson, knocked at the door and entered with a mysterious "May I speak with you, please, mum ?"

In spite of her four years of London life Mrs. Dyson still retained the guttural pronunciation and quaint

idiom of the north country from which Marion had transplanted her, and this tendency came out the more strongly when she was excited. She was in reality not much the senior of her mistress, but looked a good ten years older, having married at sixteen, and buried half a dozen children, besides her husband, and her experiences had left their mark on her impassive, hard features. She stood bolt upright, and waited for her mistress to address her. Yet the sternness of her face was overlaid by a certain grim complacency, the righteousness of the Pharisee.

Marion had already seen her while doing the ordering that morning, and she judged that this formal appearance portended something unusual, something which could not be said in the kitchen within possible earshot of the other maids.

"I hope you haven't had bad news," she said kindly.

"That's what, 'm," said Mrs. Dyson in savage satisfaction. "I'm not one to shirk my duty, though I says it as shouldn't, and though I've been varra well satisfied with my situation here, the Lord has called me to other work, and I'll hev' to ask you, 'm, to look out for some one to take my place, and may she give you that satisfaction which I trust I have always done."

"You wish to give me notice?"

"That's what. My old aunt's but poorly, begging your pardon, 'm, not to say crankety, and she's none to dee for her, seeing her only grandson, my nephew, is but a bad lot."

"But," asked Marion, in sudden dismay, "what would you do with Lu?"

"That has been a sore burden to me. The auld body canna be fashed wi' a bairn about the house, but I doubt she'll hev' to put up wi' it."

A great idea dawned on Marion. "I suppose," she said slowly, "you would never part with Lu? You wouldn't give her up even if her future were to be entirely provided for?"

Mrs. Dyson coughed a little behind her hand.

"You'll mebbies have noticed, mum, that I'm no great hand at spoiling the bairn, and it's often been in my mind to tell you her story. She's none of mine, and that's a word that has never been spoken since she were born. I passed her off as mine, me bein' a respectable married woman, to save my sister's name, and she died soon eftor : she was but a daft thing, too bonny to be virtuous. Providence'll aye couple a pretty face and a fool's brain. She was the youngest of us three, and Lu's father was of gentle-folk, but he died in furrin parts, not knowing aught of the child, and no soul but me and Lucy kent who he was. The bairn got her mother's name, and my man he thought her mine, and a' ; but he was always a feckless fool, and as ye know, 'm, he lived but a six month after Lu's birth, when you took me, mum, as a widder according to Mrs. Beresford's word, for which I have no cause to be ungrateful, seein' I was ever a first-rate cook."

Marion had listened in astonishment to the flood of talk from this dour woman, who rarely opened her lips, but who now uttered her oracular sentences with intense self-satisfaction. A certain relief mingled with the surprise. Mrs. Dyson's coldness to the bonny child had often been a matter of wonder, and this revelation in some measure explained it. Lu had stolen so completely into Marion's own heart, that, in spite of her sorrow at the forlornness of the little one's history, she was glad, for now she could keep the child always, and none could claim her.

"I am only too willing to take her off your hands altogether, Mrs. Dyson ; you need not trouble about her future at all. Will that suit you ?"

"I don't mind if you do," said the woman ; and Marion, understanding the north country idiom, was satisfied that this signified complete assent.

So it was arranged, and after a further discussion of



detail, during which Mrs. Dyson asserted that the "auld body" could very well do without her until her month's notice was up, the interview ended. When the cook left the room Marion caught up a sheet of paper and made a rough draft of a codicil to her will, providing for Lu's future at the rate of two hundred pounds yearly. This she despatched to her solicitor to be put in proper form, saying she would call and sign it in a day or so. The action was of the nature of a safety valve for the thought that was filling her mind. Poor little Lu, so forlorn and so far removed in nature and disposition from those who grudgingly owned to being the nearest of her earthly kin! Marion felt that it was by a special providence the baby had crept into her heart, and a pang smote her as she remembered she had not petted her lately so much as usual, for her mind had been occupied by other thoughts; on the impulse of the moment she rang and asked that the child might be sent up to her in an hour's time, when she would have finished her correspondence. It was a great treat for Lu to be summoned in the morning, and her gorgeous head appeared round the doorway a full five minutes before the appointed time.

"Come in, darling, I want to tell you something—a great surprise. Shut the door and climb on my knee; we won't play games to-day." Marion pressed the child to her: Lu's big, warm heart responded instantly, and her little arms crept round Marion's neck, as she lay quite still with her forehead pressed tightly against Marion's cheek.

"Does little Lu know that she is to live with me in this house always, and be my little girl? And even when she is quite big never go away from me?"

The thick head shook itself suddenly in violent negation.

"You will always be my comforter, darling. I can tell you things that I can't tell to any one else, because

you don't understand. The world shall not be a bitter fight for you, ducky, when you grow up, if I can help it. Only when you grow big don't be so foolish as to love a man, for then you'll have the worst pain of all, an ache which no one can cure. Don't even wish to. I was so foolish, I wanted to so badly, but I didn't know what it was like ; and yet I wouldn't be without it. Remember, never give your heart away until a man asks you for it, and not then unless you know that he is good. Oh what a counsel of perfection !"

There was a silence, then, from Lu's mouth, partially muffled, came the words, " Love me !"

" Oh, I do ! I do. I never knew a child like you, with your weird, wise eyes, so solemn and so childlike ! I used to think, darling, that I was frank and never concealed anything from any one ; but that was only because I had nothing worth concealing. When a bitter pain that never can be wholly satisfied gets hold of you, and eats all the life out of you and grinds round and round in you, until you have no strength or self-respect left, then you feel as the animals do, when they want to creep away into very dark corners and suffer alone, with no one to mock at them or know their pain. Oh, tell me, little witch, what must I do ?"

Lu murmured " I loves you," with complete and distinct intonation of every word, as if each were a separate fact, and, as she spoke, she grasped more firmly Marion's collar with her moist little hands.

" Always love me, darling, always, even when I am old and ugly and lonely. No, no, I won't be that, I can't live alone ! I, whom people call strong."

" When I grow up," with unexpected conversational powers, " I'se going to write and get money and be like you, and not marry. I likes getting money better."

The presence of a little child carries with it a refreshing effect, a vague suggestion of a world other than our own, and as Marion looked into those eyes with all their indefinable reach, and contrasted them

with the worldly speech the baby voice had uttered, she smiled involuntarily.

The bloom of another existence which still lingered in that baby soul would soon be worn off with the careless handling it received in this world.

"Who told you that?" she asked.

"Clemence says it. She says to be and go and be married is stupid, and she wouldn't have a great man always to say 'Don't' to her."

"Clemence is going to be married some day all the same, and if you love a great man the 'Don't' doesn't matter."

"I love you," said Lu, parrot-like, reverting to her first utterance, and clinging vehemently close. "I don't like Lizzie, and my mother's a horrid woman."

"Hush, hush, sweet, she is soon going away; then I shall be your mother, and I shall get a nice girl just to look after Lu when she is a little older, and to teach her."

"But you'll let me be with you too?"

"Bless you, baby, I will. You've comforted me. There's something in the world to live for still, the touch of baby fingers, the mystery of a little mind."

The child was still on her lap fingering her brooches, and playing with her chain, when the maid entered with the midday post.

At the sight of the handwriting on one envelope Marion sat up suddenly. The postmark was North Miningshire, and when she opened it the date was that of the day before.

"SKYE COTTAGE, NORTH MININGSHIRE,  
*March 3rd.*

"DEAR MISS HALSTED,—

"My plans have developed slowly. The machine, on its first trial, nearly killed a man, but all defects have now been remedied. When the revised edition was introduced for working purposes, the men

promptly gave in their notices. They will accept certain terms—namely, treble wages for the men who work the machines. There is no need to say we do not intend to comply. Consequently the whole district is out on an apparently interminable strike.

"Talfourd the member has succumbed to an attack of pneumonia, and I have been asked to stand in the Conservative interest. I have decided to do this. What are your own politics?"

"Yours very truly,

"STEPHEN PIERSON."

Marion read this through three times, and the colour glowed in her cheeks: it was as if his voice called to her, as if the essence of his spirit were conveyed in the letter, as if his hand had reached over the intervening miles and touched her. Her apathy had broken up, as the ice of the north-west breaks up at the breath of the chinook. She conjured up his face, with its expression of strong geniality, and she laughed aloud. Her apathy, her misery, had been due only to the unacknowledged fear that her love could never be returned. Her happy life of prosperity had ill fitted her to go alone into this darkest valley, and she had suffered proportionately. We never know what real loneliness is until we are in love. Now all that was past, he had thought of her, his letter showed a badly concealed anxiety for her opinion.

She recalled what he had said in this very room—"Then you are no true friend." He should have said, "No true lover." Now she had reached the second stage. She loved in spite of knowing nothing. What did it matter what he had done in the past? She knew him as he was now, and loved him through good and ill report, and it was for ever.

She had said she could never love—ah, well, the subtler and more intricate natures could not at once

find their counterpart, it was the plane surfaces of two common characters that were so easily matched ; but when the puzzle pieces *did* come in contact, then nothing could unlock them. Love supreme laughed at fears ; even if she knew him to be base beyond all doubt, this man of her choice, she loved him still, she had no will, no wish, but to be with him once more.

In the vivid alteration of her mood she cried aloud, " Lu darling, we are so happy ; we will have a feast this afternoon as if it were your birthday, and on Monday I go to North Miningshire."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *MARION ARRIVES IN THE NORTH.*

“Quel changement profond s'était fait en elle depuis cette époque.”  
LOTI.

IT was a dark and dreary day, a day of floods and storm, when the express train in which Marion Halsted had travelled ran into the station of the country town of North Miningshire three-quarters of an hour late. The people, waiting to meet the train, were all cloaked and coated against the wet: conspicuous among them was the Radical candidate Lawrence Pitt, a tall, broad-shouldered man, who was marked by an air of easy self-confidence, a certainty that the world would treat him well, which was far more striking than any advantage of feature, and was in itself sufficient to secure him the attention he demanded as a right.

A slight pale-faced girl looked eagerly out from the window of a first-class compartment as the train drew up, and as her eyes met his there flashed between them an indefinable current signifying mutual possession. He greeted her carelessly enough, turning at the same moment to raise his hat to Marion, who was in the next carriage; yet as he took the bundle of rugs from his wife, there was that in his manner which satisfied her hunger for him engendered by a week's absence.

Judith was of Miningshire by birth, and firmly implanted in her was that strong love of her native

county which comes to all but the most shallow, to all but those devoid of any warmth of heart. As she sat in the brougham by her husband's side she was conscious of a complete sense of well-being, to be here and to be with him were both good. At the same time a curious feeling of torpor, which made her unable to talk or show any animation, benumbed her. She listened to what he said, comprehending it all, but assenting only in monosyllables. He knew her in this mood, and did not cease his gay chatter on account of her silence.

"I saw Miss Halsted at the station. What is she doing up here, Ju? Do you think she has any interest in the election?" he asked.

"She is a cousin of the Beresfords," said Judith. "I knew her when I was a child, and hated her; she possessed all that I wanted."

"Beresford has done us more damage than any other man; Miss Halsted will be a redoubtable ally; she is a smart woman."

"I hate the word!"

"Substitute a better."

She tried and failed.

"Ju," he said, leaning forward to get a better look at her, "why am I kept at arm's length? Must I humbly ask for a kiss?"

A thrill ran through Judith, animating her lethargy; she was not yet used to this wonderful marriage even though the fact was a year old. She smiled at him, and he kissed her as the Beresfords' dog-cart, with Marion Halsted and her boy-cousin, Ker Beresford, seated in it, shot past.

Judith flamed. "I hope they didn't see."

"Damage my character irretrievably," said Pitt, laughing. "A man making love to his own wife on the high road!"

She answered the laugh, and, being awakened, questioned him on matters concerning the election.

"I think we shall do," he told her ; "the pitmen's candidate is not a popular man. A split, a faction, against him, will halve his votes ; there is the chance that the bulk of the pitmen may abstain from voting at all, not willing that he should get in, but inveterately hating a decent man. On the other hand, those men who are Radicals by real conviction, and might have voted for a decent pitmen's candidate, will come over to me. The small tradespeople are ours, likewise farmers, for it is a Radical country. Hallo, what's this ?"

The brougham had stopped suddenly, and there was a swirl of many waters. The stream rushing down in flood had carried a large bough against the low arched bridge over which the road ran. The water, being thus partially dammed, had risen and spread, lake-like, over the fields on the other side, and deluged the road in a muddy torrent. Ker stood on the road, holding the head of a sensitive starting mare, and when he saw Pitt he called out : "Shall you try it ? I daren't, the mare would jib in the middle ; besides, it's pretty strong."

For a moment there was silence, and the hiss of the rain, and the sullen beat of the flooding water sounded ominously.

Marion and Judith exchanged greetings ; the former laughed. "What a headline for the papers, Mr. Pitt," she said mischievously. "'Miraculous Escape of the Radical Candidate !' 'His daring conduct in the face of peril !' Our side doesn't get the opportunity for such things."

He came to her side. "You had better work it up and write it for us. We'll keep your secret, and not betray you to your own party."

Ker did not countenance amenities between rival camps. His raw young blood had not ceased to throb to the tune of "No compromise," to him one issue yet obscured the whole of life.



"We are going back to the fork, and home by the high road; it will only be a couple of miles out of the way," he said.

"Humph! What are we to do, Judith? You know the country better than I do," said Pitt.

"The high road is of no use to us," she answered decidedly. "We can go along the cart track by the railway embankment; that would carry us over the stream. Ask Tompkins."

The coachman demurred, inclined to risk the flooding water that lay between him and his tea.

"You'll be fools if you try it," said Ker bluntly.

Judith's eyes met his in amusement.

"I thought we were that already in politics," she said.

Ker laughed in boyish confusion. "You used to be Conservative," he answered, still more rudely, as he drove off; "but when a woman's married she only reflects the opinions of her husband!"

The long drive round by the high road was accomplished safely, and as the Beresfords' trap drew near to the lodge, Ker remarked casually, "I shouldn't wonder if we find Pierson up at the house."

Marion experienced an uncontrollable access of nervousness. How entirely the inner course of her life had been changed since she had last visited her relations. She did not disguise from herself that she had travelled north on purpose to meet this man, but now that the meeting was imminent the audacity of the venture showed itself grinning before her. The arguments that she had used to herself—that women, especially women of to-day, helped matters forward in the initial stages of a courtship far more than was popularly acknowledged, and that she was no barbaric girl, but a tactful woman, by whom the motive could be securely concealed—fell away in shreds, leaving her action in all its brazenness. She hoped wildly that he would not be there on her first

entry, when the eyes of all her relatives would be upon her to note any nervousness or self-betrayal.

Yet he was there, and in the first moment of shaking hands she knew that no idealisation had encrusted her dream ; his genial smile, his little tricks of manner, vivid and actual, were better than her expectation. While she sat at tea she knew instinctively that time alone, without any adventitious help from circumstance, had ripened the growth of the intimacy between them, and that he and she were on more friendly terms than they had been at their last meeting.

Mr. Pierson only stayed about ten minutes after she had entered the house, for Mr. Beresford soon made a move. "Well, if we have to get to the works before those fellows leave," he said, "we ought to be moving. It isn't often that I have to be time-keeper for you, Pierson," and they went away together.

The political situation in North Miningshire was interesting. Since the death of Alsop, the pitmen's candidate, a week before the last election, there had been dissensions innumerable as to his successor ; these had been without definite result until the death of Talfourd, the sitting member, had brought the election again within the range of practical politics. Then a man named Garthwaite, a checkweighman, had been forced to the front by his supporters, and by the tactics of sheer bullying had been put forward as the official candidate of the local miners' union. He was in politics a rank Socialist, pledged to any and every absurdity that might win him a handful of votes, and thus bring him nearer the golden goal—the three hundred a year paid by the union to its member.

It is but just to say there were among the members of the union many able and reasonable men, who would have filled the place with fair

credit to themselves, subject to the limitations of deficient education and the narrowness of mental outlook which such limitation necessarily entails.

Alsop, who had died, had been by no means a bad fellow, with an innate shrewdness that counter-balanced many defects; but Garthwaite owned no redeeming feature. In addition to the ordinary Socialist programme, including nationalisation of the land, he advocated the nationalisation of the mines. His own immediate adherents had disseminated gratis their belief in the sequence of the millennium on his election; for according to them the double nationalisation would include the abolition of royalties, and as the price of coal would be kept up artificially by Government, the royalties would go to swell the "Wages Fund."

These doctrines, which, of course, appealed chiefly to the lowest and most ignorant of the electors, had sufficed to ensure Garthwaite a numerous following. The uselessness of attempting to expose the utter absurdities and gross fallacies which underlay them had long been borne in on the other candidates, for the audiences which they addressed consisted either of fairly educated people who had the common sense to see the absurdity for themselves, or of a howling mob to which reason appealed in vain.

Of the other candidates, Pierson would of course receive the votes which had been accorded to the late Conservative member Talfourd; but these were a mere fraction of the whole, and had only been successful at the last election on account of the abstention of hundreds of miners.

Pierson was popular with his men, and might have gained a vote here and there in the secrecy of the ballot but for the introduction of his machines at this inopportune moment.

Pitt had the advantage of having fought the constituency once before, and he also claimed the mass

of votes, outside the pitmen, among the small trades-people and farmers.

The division was a very large one, including many outlying districts as well as the market town itself, and Pierson was fortunate in having the services of an invaluable agent. This man, Mr. Richards, was, if the testimony of the senses was to be believed, exempt from the ordinary limitations of mankind, for, as the Irishman said, he could be in two places at once, "like a bird." He was indefatigable in his efforts, and had engaged every available meeting-place, including all the best school-rooms, when his rival had only just realised there was to be an election. He had arranged the canvassing, and made himself universally popular, contradicted certain discreditable stories about Pierson, and had set afloat counter stories so discreetly that no one could have suspected him of their authorship. His whole heart and soul were bent on winning this election, and for the time being his horizon did not extend beyond the polling day. Yet he had a gigantic task before him; the pitmen out-numbered the other voters in the constituency by five to one, and, however much they might rebel in their hearts, were not likely to flout the union openly by refusing to vote for its official candidate.

The miners had character certainly, but it was not the character usually attributed to them by the men of the south. The ideal pitman, as sketched in fiction, is a fine, straight-backed, God-fearing fellow, shrewd yet simple, strong to follow his own line, a bit free and easy in his manners maybe, lacking the courtesy of the south, but upright, candid, and trustworthy to the core. Men like this could perhaps have been found in North Miningshire, but the lower set, who carried their way by sheer weight of numbers, were of no good type. The average man was a wiry, self-satisfied little

fellow, sharp no doubt, but extremely limited. The decision of the union in the case of Geordie Brown, the reason for a new levy, why the greyhound Meadow-Sweet beat young Black-as-Coal in the last coursing match, these things possessed an absorbing interest for him; wars and rumours of wars affected him but little, legislation and change of government only as it directly touched his own interest. The men were not stupid, but any argument or appeal to common sense would have fallen on barren ground, because the union had absolute authority, and the union officials had declared for Garthwaite.

This authority was the more amazing as the pitmen had a serene and unyielding belief in themselves, and were dogged and obstinate as any other class of their own standing in matters of opinion generally, but where their association was concerned, they were led with amazing facility. The union held an absolute power, perhaps unequalled elsewhere in these democratic days; this might partly be due to tradition, which pointed to the numerous benefits the union had undoubtedly earned for its members in past times, or it might be because the tyranny of an oligarchy is the strongest form of tyranny and the least easy to break. The officials held the strings, and pulled them as they pleased, and the men in the mass danced like marionettes. By a summary statement, based technically on a ballot, the union threw a whole county into disorder, drove away trade, thereby reducing thousands of men to starvation, and compelled owners to close pits which still held enough coal to suffice for many a year's work for hundreds of men. By another mandate it used the funds which men had subscribed for times of distress to pay the law costs of a cantankerous Radical member, and this it did with a supreme disregard of the opinions of any dissentients in its ranks. Woe be to him who

attempted to cavil, on the ground that the association was not a Radical organisation, but more of the nature of a Friendly Society, and that it was exceeding its legitimate functions! Such a daring dissentient would be ground to power beneath the Juggernaut wheels!

It was not difficult to guess the ultimate goal at which the oligarchy of the union aimed, it was the right of retaining or dismissing labour at all collieries. When two lazy ruffians had been deservedly dismissed, after repeated warnings, for filling up their tubs with slag and stone, technically "brass," the union had brought the whole of the men at that colliery out on strike. There had been a ballot, of course, but the wishes of the officials were well known; besides, the young men without any encumbrance thought it fine to have a holiday and get paid for doing nothing, and as they outnumbered the older and more prudent heads of families by two to one, it was not difficult to manage these things! Until the day comes when an owner shall be forced humbly to ask if he may dismiss a man who is doing no work, or shall be compelled to carry on his pits at a loss, out of pure philanthropy, the union will not rest. Until that golden era, skirmishes and broils between masters and workmen are the food on which it lives, and the day of perfect peace would be the day of its doom.

Though Mr. Richards thoroughly understood electioneering, he had not made a special study of the attitude of the pitmen toward their union, and he believed that men so shrewd, so apparently strong-willed, would take their own line when it came to a matter of voting, and perhaps be the more influenced to vote against Garthwaite because he had been forced on them; therefore he was sanguine of success. Mr. Beresford, being by nature of a hopeful disposition, rather anticipated the same thing, but he

differed a little from Mr. Richards as to the manner of canvassing; he humorously enunciated some golden maxims garnered from a long experience :—

“Don’t presume to tell a pitman anything, let him tell you; it comes to the same thing in the end, and you may win his vote under the verdict, ‘He’ll mebbies dee, he’s no moocky pride aboot him.’”

“Chin-chucking as a form of canvassing is quite obsolete, every pit lass is a young lady nowadays, but it’s safe to admire the children under the age at which they cease to be a nuisance.”

Marion had known the district so well in former years that she had a fairly good idea of what the state of the political parties would be, but she had not allowed for the discreditable stories against Pierson which were rampant in the division.

These were not long in coming to her ears. Just before she went to dress for dinner that night her uncle came into the drawing-room in a state of perturbation, and strode up and down.

“It’s monstrous!” he said angrily to his wife, disregarding Marion’s presence. “Perfectly monstrous! I can’t believe that Pitt has a hand in circulating these worn-out tales.”

“It’s unfortunate they are founded on fact,” said Mrs. Beresford drily.

He wheeled round impetuously. “What if they are?” he asked. “I wouldn’t condemn a man for any act committed once, even if it were a deplorable sin, nor do I think it right that the memory of it should nullify all his efforts for good in all other directions for the rest of his life.”

Here at all events was something tangible. Marion waited only until her uncle had gone out, and then proceeded with her usual directness to get the truth of the matter from her aunt.

“What is this story about Mr. Pierson, Aunt Edith?” she asked.

"A very disreputable story," said Mrs. Beresford. "If Mr. Pierson had been the Radical candidate, this would have sufficed to put him beyond the pale altogether; but, with your uncle, a man's political convictions cover a multitude of sins. Of course everything happened years ago; it was in all the papers. I remember it very well. Mr. Pierson was co-respondent in a divorce case between Lord and Lady Briar."

"How did the case end?" Marion asked frigidly.

"Oh, there was no defence attempted, Lord Briar won without any difficulty. I believe Mr. Pierson never even put in an appearance and had to pay enormous costs."

"Then what happened to Lady Briar? He did not marry her."

"No, that puzzled every one greatly; she disappeared from society altogether, went to live on the Continent, so they say."

Mrs. Beresford was a tall, severe, rather handsome woman, who still adhered to the almost obsolete fashion of caps. She had great penetration, but had been born in the days when the fiction that a woman's skull covered no brains still flourished, just as in the present day the fiction that she has no legs is still adhered to in polite society. Mrs. Beresford had a strong nature which had been forcibly compressed into one mould in childhood, and which still wore the shape of the impress. Her days had been days of formalism, when family affection openly expressed was considered indecent; so, though she might zealously defend her daughters against the world, she never caressed them; when she spoke of them to her husband it was always as "your daughters," as if she herself had no part nor lot in them. She ordered the household in a regular routine, and was quite unselfish in matters of general family comfort. She was no kill-joy nor wet blanket, but she lived



a life of her own, with books of solid instruction, and she read the quarterly reviews at which no other member of the household ever looked. The difficulty of considering how such a woman had entered into the intimate relations of matrimony and domesticity was insuperable. She had the knack of saying now and again rather smart things that tasted bitter ; these amused Marion, who found her society far from insipid, and was on more cordial terms with her than was any one else in the world.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *POLITICAL CONTEST.*

"An election, whether managed directly by ballot-box on public hustings, or indirectly by force of public opinion, or were it even by open alehouses, landlord's coercion, or popular club-law, or whatever electoral methods, is always an interesting phenomenon."

CARLYLE.

"No thanks, Ker, I like waiting on myself." Marion paraded round the breakfast-table flourishing an empty cup. Mrs. Beresford had not yet appeared; the two girls, Amy and Florrie, were gulping down a hasty breakfast preparatory to attending one of the last meets of the hounds. They were energetic specimens of a type of girlhood quite as peculiar to the present time as the so-called "new woman," though it has evoked much less discussion—that is to say, the athletic type. They were strongly knit, healthy, boyish young women, who abhorred books, and denounced fashions as frippery, who rode straight to hounds, bicycled fifty miles in a day, played in golf contests from morn to eve, and were never happy except when out of doors. The public school virtues flourished in such congenial soil, the girls were trustworthy, candid, plucky, and sensible, in fact, gentlemanly boys in petticoats.

There is nothing surprising in the appearance of such a type, it might have been expected at the extreme swing of the pendulum in antithesis to the novel-reading heroines (warranted to faint at the

sight of the hero) of a former generation ; but it is worth noting that there has been no transition stage, no intermediate type, combining the vices and virtues of both. From the aforesaid heroines to the modern boy-girl is a sheer leap in space : the latter specimens have no connection with anything that has gone before, least of all with their own mothers, and the speculation as to the probable habits of their direct lineal descendants is an interesting one.

The girls frankly avowed ignorance concerning the election, and freely discussed other matters while Marion gleaned items about the political situation from her uncle.

"The writ was issued at the end of last week," he said. "The nomination took place yesterday, Tuesday, and the polling will be on Monday next. What's that you say? The strike? Oh yes, of course it affects the situation. Pierson might have delayed the introduction of his 'infernal' machines for a while if he had known this was coming on. By the way, Marion, you know how to use a typewriter?"

Marion nodded.

"Come! For a modern woman you're not wholly useless! I want a dozen copies of a resolution typed. There's carbon and all the rest in my study."

"Father's notion of a useful woman is one who can clear up all the odds and ends a man can't find time to do himself," said Amy, laughing. "Perhaps we shall run across you in your canvassing, Far; we're sure to draw the Low Whins first, for the meet is at the Four Roads."

"If Mr. Marson isn't there, the deputy master shirks Low Whins," cut in Florence. "Are you coming, Ker?"

"What's the good of going on foot? You girls use all the available horses," growled Ker.

"That's nonsense; you could have had your turn if you'd been keen. You care much more about

this stupid old election, you know you do," said Amy.

"I don't think that's a very grave aspersion," said Marion, smiling. "What are you going to do to-day, Ker?"

"I'll drive you about if you'll come with me," he said eagerly. "The programme's more or less of a tour through outlying villages; I have the list. We have not a whole week left for work, you know, and there's heaps to be done."

"Mr. Pierson is staying with his sister, I suppose?" Marion asked her uncle.

"Yes, and it's handy for us, only a mile across the fields; I can get hold of him whenever I like. Now type those things, there's a good girl."

Marion retired full of joy at being in the contest; she was here, and she was helpful. Never had she taken half the pains over her own typing that she took over this resolution. She had nearly finished, when the aristocratic young secretary, whom she had seen at Fulham, appeared, and inquired deferentially for her work.

"Where is Mr. Pierson?" she asked, as she gave the papers to him.

"He has ridden over to Walton, Lord Pitholm's place, for breakfast. I am to meet him at Sleetburn Village," he replied nervously, as he grasped the papers and hurried away.

He had hardly vanished when Marion heard Ker shouting for her in the hall; she responded gladly, dancing upstairs for her hat like a child. Mrs. Beresford paused in a quiet progress to the morning-room.

"I am counting on you to assist me this afternoon, Marion," she said. "It is my 'at home' day."

Marion nodded assent, and drove off with Ker in capital spirits. It was all so new to her, the flaming posters on the end of every wall, the party colours, the election literature, which she and Ker

strewed broadcast as they went along. The country roads were much more lively than usual, and at the villages where the dog-cart stopped the men out of work sometimes came forward to gossip on the political situation ; others, squatting at the street corners, gave Ker a familiar and patronising nod, as if they regarded him with amused tolerance.

Towards eleven o'clock the dog-cart passed a deserted line of houses built of rubble stone with front walls bulging out of the perpendicular ; many of the roofs had fallen in, and the shells of stone formed a refuge at nights for the lowest tramps—doors hung on broken hinges, grass grew freely in every crevice. The row had belonged to a former colliery, and had been allowed to fall to pieces as it stood when the tenants had migrated to seek work elsewhere. At the far end two of the houses were whitewashed, and evidently tenanted, and as Marion came abreast of them the name of the dismal place, stuck upon a rude signboard, caught her eye.

"Tail-Up-on-End !" she exclaimed. "This is where my cook's aunt lives ; do you mind if I stop to see her for a moment ?"

She scrambled down and knocked timidly at the nearest door, receiving a gruff "Come in" in answer.

The interior did not look encouraging. There was a red brick floor with dirt and scraps in holes and crevices. An odorous patchwork rug was spread before a wide fireplace, which was piled up with half a hundredweight of small coal. On the mantelpiece staring china dogs gazed at a few framed funeral cards, adorned with black weeping willows and white angels. The furniture of the room included a mahogany chest of drawers, deal table, and chair, and a four-post bed with unutterably dirty coverings. In it lay a haggard old woman with dishevelled locks of grey hair, and in the only chair sat a villainous-looking man.

Marion approached the bed, but, finding no resemblance in its occupant to her stern, clean cook, asked :

"Have I made a mistake? Are you Mrs. Rawson?"

"That's my name. What may yours be?"

"I'm Miss Halsted."

The grim suspicion of manner changed to a certain courtesy, not undignified.

"You're welcome. Sit yourself down."

The man grunted, rose from his chair, and slouched to the door.

"Your niece will have told you she is leaving me at the end of the month," said Marion, occupying the seat thus vacated. "I'm sure you will be very glad to have her."

"She can come if she's a mind to," said Mrs. Rawson indifferently.

"Have you no one to look after you?"

"Timothy, him's my grandson, he does varra weel. There's no call to fash yoursel'."

"But it must be very hard for you as you are bedridden."

"I've been on my back a year come Michaelmas, and I've changed but once. There's no call for any outsider to interfere, we keeps oursel's to oursel's."

The arm of her nightgown was grey with dirt.

"But are there no neighbours to help you?"

"I tells you we knows very few, we keeps oursel's to oursel's," repeated Mrs. Rawson, with an indescribable ring of pride in her voice at the expression of what she considered the hall-mark of exclusiveness—an ignorant assumption not by any means confined only to those of her class and her position.

"Your grandson's out of work like the rest?" said Marion, by way of leading up to an offer of money.

"He got his notice before the others, he don't hold wi' Pierson."

"Does he belong to any club?"

"Na, na, the union's good enough for us."

The miners' association, locally "the Union," was, it seemed, above being called a club. Marion saw that any offer of money would be received as an insult, and the unproductiveness of the visit galled her. She was not used to having her overtures rejected, and when she rejoined Ker, she endorsed his strong expression of distaste for the self-opinionated unteachableness of women like Mrs. Rawson. Together they fumed as they drove away.

"Faugh!" said Ker, "that brute, the grandson, came out and leaned against the door-post as he scanned me from head to foot; it goes against the grain to be civil to him, but I thought of the cause and said good day. 'Ye'll be one of Beresfords likely,' he said familiarly. 'Ye'll hev a canny bit canvassing to dee,' and he grinned. He hates Mr. Pierson, for he was turned away from one of his pits, before the strike began, for persistently shirking the undercutting of the coal, 'kirving' as they call it here. Of course Pierson had nothing whatever to do with it, never even heard his name; it was the official who was responsible, and I only wonder he didn't send the great hulking brute about his business long ago; but the union turned him into what they term 'a sacrificed man,' and would have come out on strike about him if this larger issue had not turned up. One writhes to think he is maintained in idleness; if he felt the pinch a bit it might make some impression. One longs for a discipline stern enough and painful enough to lick such a cub into shape."

"What does each man get from the union?" Marion asked.

"Ten shillings a week, and they go round with carts collecting bread and vegetables, and anything they can get from other pit districts not out on strike. One wonders that the respectable men among them can humble themselves to do such dirty begging, but somehow their pride is all wrong; they are proud as

Lucifer when they might take sincere advice, and humble as mud when it comes to something like pauperism."

A little further on they met a four-in-hand driven by Pitt, with his wife on the box-seat by his side. Judith's eyes were bright, and she bowed gaily to the opposition vehicle.

"Haven't we a four-in-hand?" Marion asked regretfully. "It's a much more suitable conveyance for us than for the Radicals."

"Lord Pitholm has one, and he is one of Pierson's best supporters. He has taken Pierson's cause up warmly, they say he wouldn't be at all displeased at a marriage between him and Lady Aline. I don't think there's anything in it, though no doubt Pierson's money would be very welcome up there; Pitholm's poor for his position, and can't give his sister much."

A spasm of acute indignation pierced Marion.

"Lady Aline?" she repeated contemptuously. "But she's quite a little girl, isn't she?"

"She must be two-and-twenty now; she's about two years older than I am."

"I remember her as such an ugly child, with a nipped-in freckled face and brown eyes."

"She's a beauty now, according to the society papers," laughed Ker. "She is really rather pretty too—reddish hair and reddish-brown eyes."

"But Lord Pitholm would never let her marry Mr. Pierson?"

"Perhaps Lady Aline would do it if she wanted without asking him. It's an odd thing—I can't understand it, though I've often heard it—Pierson's a regular lady-killer; every woman he sees falls in love with him."

Marion was silent.

"It's odd, isn't it? He's not a bit the sort one would imagine. He's so awkward and ugly, and dresses so badly; but they say women adore him



and that he could marry any one he pleased. There is a story that he has a wife somewhere, but he married her before he had risen in the scale, so he shut her up in a lunatic asylum."

"Don't be a scandal-monger, Ker. You're as bad as an old woman," said Marion sternly.

"Oh, I didn't say I believed it ; the man's straight enough, so far as I can see. Here they are. I thought we should drop upon them somewhere."

There were large carpet works on the river, a mile below the town, and the employés of these were assembled in their dinner hour to hear a political address. Mr. Pierson was standing with his supporters on a waggon as an extemporised platform, and he spoke to the men with the easy good-humour of one who thoroughly understood his audience. He spoke colloquially, for the gathering was more of a friendly than a formal meeting. He roughly reviewed the improvement in trade since the Conservatives had been in office, and his words were so simple that some of his supporters feared that he was aiming below the mental level of his audience ; but that it was not so was proved by the simplicity of the questions addressed to him when he finished his speech.

He looked old as he stood there hatless in the spring sunshine ; his crisp hair was rapidly turning grey. Marion noted it, and once more to herself scornfully repudiated the notion of his being a suitable husband in any way for such a girl as Lady Aline. She looked away from him once, at the group of working men with their tin cans, and at the great factory itself, with a few frowsy-haired girls in the windows and doorway—the better dressed element, the designers and clerks, held aloof, as if politics were not quite respectable—and then her gaze wandered over the moist fields and the sparkling river ; but she brought it back suddenly to the little group in an attempt to see its central figure as he appeared to

others. She saw an oldish man with a benevolent, good-humoured, powerful face, dressed in clothes that bulged at the pockets and knees. His large, forcible right hand emphasised the points of his speech. In chin and brow there was virility—he was a man. How could such a one as Lady Aline be a mate for him?—a woman unable to understand the masculine element at all; a woman with a little narrow mind fettered by tradition. But for herself how she could appreciate him, how willing she would be to fling her individuality into all the channels that coincided with his, blocking up other outlets, so that the heightened current might flow in unison. She must triumph ultimately, because she understood him so perfectly. Their union might be one of those rare unions of heart and brain; so she thought, sailing along in the full flood of her dream, as only a woman of active imagination can do.

She was awakened by the break-up of the meeting, and the dispersal of the uniform whole into groups and knots.

Mr. Beresford and Mr. Pierson came toward the dog-cart.

"Go behind, Ker," said the former. "Mr. Pierson is going to drive back. You can drop Marion at our gates."

"Or I can go on to Skye Cottage and bring the dog-cart back," suggested Marion.

"That is very kind of you," said Mr. Pierson, turning suddenly to her; he had not greeted her more formally.

He drove and Ker sat behind. The trio chattered of the election only, until the lodge gates were reached; when Ker, who had but a schoolboy's measure of tact, began to insist that Marion should alight, and that he should go on to Skye Cottage to bring back the dog-cart.

Marion could say nothing, so waited hopelessly.

"You have much to do for us, Ker," said Mr. Pier-son slowly; "I can't allow you to waste your time driving about the country unnecessarily, so you stay here, since Miss Halsted is kind enough to say she will come on with me."

The boy gave in.

Thus they were alone once more, he and she, after a long blank separation.

"I'm glad you wrote," said Marion suddenly. "It was a trumpet call to battle."

"I was not sure if you would so interpret it."

"What else are you doing to-day?"

"Meetings, addresses eternally. You are coming to the Town Hall to-night?"

"Yes."

"I want to say something to you about that lad, your cousin Ker. This is, I suppose, delicate ground, yet I must speak plainly. Your uncle is rather hard on him, I believe—keeps him short of money?"

"Yes, he is most unjust in regard to Ker; the girls may have what they like. But how——"

"Ah, I know most things. No, he has said nothing to me, but the old man has sympathy with young fellows. Now I can't give him anything directly at present, for his father won't let him be one of my accredited sub-agents, and otherwise one has to be so very careful; but he is working hard for me, and I should like him to have ten pounds for pocket-money; now I am going to ask you to be trustee of this amount, and hand it on to him. You see? That's all right. What more natural than that you should give your young cousin a tip?"

"But why don't you give it to him yourself directly? He has no vote."

"It might be misconstrued; besides, I don't want the boy to know that it comes from me at all."

"Oh, I didn't understand; no, I couldn't do that."

"Where is the difficulty?"

She felt for the first time that Mr. Pierson lacked that delicate tact with which she had so abundantly credited him.

"It is making me appear more generous than I am," she said slowly.

"I won't press it, of course, but I should not like the lad to know the source of it; there is no fathoming the possible indiscretion of a boy's tongue."

It seemed to Marion that he was shielding himself from risk at the expense of her pride, and she was hurt that he did not see it in that light also. Yet that strange instinct which compels women to sacrifice their own feelings at the hands of those they love urged her to a complete surrender. The touchstone of real pride lies in its behaviour at the hands of a lover; if a slightly unreasonable demand leads to coldness and estrangement, then it is no real pride, but is compounded of pique, self-love, and other ingredients. Though Marion felt she gave all in submission, even to openly avowing to her companion how much she would do for him, she yet was not abashed; but on the contrary she gloried in saying:

"I will do anything you wish."

She felt that he must recognise the complete abdication of her own rights of sovereignty; to no other being on earth would she have said those words in regard to a similar matter, and she hungered for his acknowledgment. He made no answer, and they drove on in silence which to Marion was full of a palpitating possibility. Had he realised her surrender? When she looked at him he was frowning.

"Well," she said indifferently, "are you not sensible of the magnitude of my sacrifice?"

The tone and manner were removed from those in which she had uttered her last sentence by unfathomable depths; she had completely wiped away any impression she might have before conveyed.

"I am hurt," he said severely, "that you should

imagine me capable of pressing you to do anything you did not wish to do."

She was humbled instantly, and ready to plead guilty, with or without cause.

"I had some reason——" she began.

"To think me a brute? I daresay; in women's novels the brute is always indicated, I believe, by large limbs or a bulky frame."

It was her turn to be offended; she sat in dignified silence until they reached Skye Cottage. There she declined to come in, and turned homewards. He said adieu with his warmest, kindest smile, and reminded her of her promise to be at his meeting that night. She drove off in a state of irritation. Had she been a man she might have found some vent in bad language; as it was she had to exercise superhuman control not to jag at the mare's mouth mercilessly, or use the whip; she felt cruel, callous, brutal.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### "SORROW'S FIRE-WHIP."

"A man who's not afraid to say his say  
Though a whole town's against him."

LONGFELLOW.

"THAT," said Mrs. Beresford as the door-bell rang loudly, "is Mrs. Nutton; she always arrives before the time at which she was asked; she calls it being informal."

The woman who entered did not look as if it were in her power to be informal, even in thought. She sat down and poured out in a rapid undertone a eulogy of Mrs. Pitt, whom she had just seen—a eulogy received by Mrs. Beresford with the barest acknowledgment that courtesy demanded.

There was a long interval before the next arrival, during which Marion had time to reflect on the inferiority of the average middle-aged woman to the average middle-aged man; and then she was called upon to entertain her aunt's visitors. Between four and half-past they arrived in batches; social hours are earlier in the north than in the south country. The election formed a convenient topic on entry; it afforded more side issues than the weather, for instance, and each visitor prided herself on her originality, as she entered with precisely the same phrase that had done duty for her predecessor. But directly two of the guests got together they dropped their simulated interest by common consent, and

began upon topics more congenial and more vital to both.

Marion was amused by the scraps of conversation which reached her ears; she learned that by all accounts the new curate was a gentleman, though he was a fat, podgy little man, for he was distantly related to the So-and-sos, of So-and-so; that he gave out he had had to resign his last curacy because the attentions of the ladies became too much for a modest man. One of the speakers was the secretary of a working women's society, and soon laid aside the curate to detail her own personal grievances against the members of the aristocracy who were on her committee.

It appeared that Lady Aline and her friends were inclined to form a ring fence from which they excluded the aforesaid useful secretary.

"The last time we had a meeting," said that indignant lady, "they began talking about the election of a new member. 'Shall we ask Mary, Aline?' said the Honourable Mrs. Renfoo.

"'Dear little Mary!' rejoined Lady Aline. 'How odd it would be to have her on a committee!'

"'Mary!' chimed in another. 'Out of the question! Try Kate.'

"'You must ask her then, Lady Aline, none of us dare.'

"'Certainly; Kate it shall be; I am quite willing.'

"I struck in here," continued the secretary, "and said I should be happy to know who Kate was, so that I could enter her name on the books."

"I did not know Lady Aline was insolent," said her listener, who had been entranced at this familiarity with the aristocracy.

"They all are. If you read a book called 'Dodo,' you'll see."

"Dear me, what an odd name! I wonder what it means? There is a bird——"

"We have it in our circulating library, Mrs. Tamlin, but you won't be able to get it—the names are down for months ahead."

Marion smiled; she had forgotten this obsolete world, where a book half a decade old was fought for, as the latest thing; then she heard a scrap of her aunt's conversation.

"Yes, he behaved very badly; I am sorry for the girl."

"Mrs. Enoch told me yesterday it positively made her heart bleed to see her."

"That kind of hemorrhage does not cause me any very great anxiety."

"Well, they do say if it wasn't for decency's sake he would now be engaged to the fourth daughter. I saw two of them the other day at the Armitages'; you were there, didn't you think they looked very well?"

"Extraordinarily well for plain girls," said Mrs. Beresford caustically.

"I congratulated Mr. Harding the other day," said another lady close by; "he looked as if he would strike me, and turned his back on me without a word. They say he hates being congratulated."

"Thinks it's ironical, perhaps; but really his *fiancé* is quite passable at night, and looks nearly young enough for him."

"Yes, you don't see that sallow complexion so much by gaslight."

A timid voice addressed Marion. "I remember you very well when you were a little girl in a pinafore, Miss Halsted, and now I suppose you've written a book. Dear me, isn't it very difficult?"

"That is a difficult question to answer."

"I don't mean the actual writing, of course—though that would be bad enough to me; I never can write a letter—but the people in it. How do you do it? Do you think the plot out all beforehand, or as you go along?"



For about the thousandth time Marion replied to the identical question. "I have a rough idea at first, of course, but I work it out as I go along."

"And the people; do you take them from real life?"

"Not consciously."

"What's that? Not conscientiously? But I don't think there's any harm in it, do you? Why, I should be quite proud of being in a book, will you put me in your next one?"

"It is quite possible; but I am not writing one at present."

"You know, Miss Halsted—I dare say it to you, for I have known you so long—I believe I could write myself. I have a great power of observation, and can read people's characters the first time I meet them; don't you think I could write a novel?"

"I'm sure of it," replied Marion, using the only formula which she had found to be effective in such cases.

"Of course," continued her companion, "I admit I have had special advantages; my husband lives the literary life."

"Indeed! He is the rector, is he not?" Marion asked, turning to her with more interest.

"Yes. Have you not read any of his works?"

"I'm afraid—I'm really sorry—it's so stupid, I can't recall them for the moment; tell me the names of some."

"The principal one—yes, I think we may really say the principal one—is entitled 'The Christian Life.' It is published by the Mission Tract Society; you can get it—it costs ninepence with the discount off."

Marion with difficulty subdued her impulse to laugh.

"He writes for magazines too; oh yes, he is very busy," continued the rector's wife gravely. "I have

with me now his latest article. I thought your aunt would care to see it, but perhaps I may entrust it to you," and she drew out of a reticule, which she had nursed during the whole of her visit, the parish magazine, and pointed out a little address signed by the rector.

Marion received it graciously, and when the last guest had departed, solemnly presented it to her aunt.

Mrs. Beresford smiled, she never laughed. "Mrs. Johnson herself has yearnings toward the 'literary life,'" she said; "she was awestruck by the fact that you had written a novel, though I believe the fact that you had a lady's maid nearly balanced it in interest."

"She lives in a literary atmosphere," said Marion gaily.

"She is a sounding trumpet for her husband, and also serves him as an embodied excuse for indulging in all the little amenities of life. He is perpetually devising treats for 'my wife' which he enjoys, purchasing for her consumption delicacies which he eats himself, and when he takes a trip to the Continent it is absolutely essential for her health."

From the tea-table with its laden atmosphere of petty gossip the scene changed to the Meat Market attached to the Town Hall, a theatre of political combat.

From all the villages for miles round the men and lads streamed in hours before the advertised time, in order to secure seats well to the front, for this was one of Mr. Pierson's most important meetings. North Miningshire could not, at all events, be accused of political apathy. The market was crowded; even in such points of vantage as the deep stone window seats high above the heads of the crowd young men and lads swarmed. Outside the building a gathering a third as large as the original one formed an overflow.

The mining element of course largely preponderated. Agricultural voters had so long been numerically swamped, as to be practically disenfranchised ; but they were used to it, and attended the meetings with as much zeal as if each man's vote might decide the fate of the empire.

Catcalls and whistles, starting from various corners of the hall, enlivened the dreary time of waiting before the principal actors appeared. Nuts and a dried kernel, called a carline, much in evidence at this time of year, were filiped from one to another in showers. The drops of moisture deposited on the window-panes from the combined lungs of the multitude trickled slowly down ; the scarlet and blue of the Union Jack, and the mottoes of the Conservative party, smote with crude effect on the bare outlines and rough walls of the market. Mrs. Beresford and Marion had driven in together, and sat in the front row below the platform. The candidate himself had been dining at the Castle, and would arrive under the guardianship of Lord Pitholm. John Densley, Earl of Pitholm, was only twenty-four, and had succeeded to the title some four years before under peculiarly sad circumstances. His parents had been in a railway accident, which resulted in a fearful loss of life, and had both succumbed to the injuries they had received. Much sympathy had been felt for the brother and sister thus surrounded by a halo of sad romance, a reflection of the incidents common in penny novelettes, but not frequent in real life. Marion had not seen Lord Pitholm and Lady Aline since they were children ; she remembered them as a delicate-looking little couple, always surrounded by a cohort of nurses and governesses ; so she waited with some curiosity to see what they had now developed into.

The first excitement was caused by a detached body of Mr Pierson's supporters, who came on to the platform by themselves, and were greeted by a volley

of claps and cheers, mingled in some instances with derisive shouts ; but the noise was nothing to that which greeted the main party. It began in a subdued roar in the market-place outside, and was caught up and echoed by those within, culminating in thunderous roars and piercing shrieks—a storm of sound that shook the building when the candidate himself entered with all the most influential county magnates, and mounted directly to the platform.

Lord Pitholm was in the chair, and stood up nervously, looking very slight and boyish, but he was quite unable to make himself heard. He began hesitatingly, but apparently made up his mind to go through with the little speech of introduction he had set himself, though not one single word was audible.

He looked strained and world-weary, as if, to use a popular phrase, he had been "born tired"; so that more than one of the crowd would have granted him grace if they could : but units were of no avail against a multitude.

Then Mr. Pierson himself rose, and stood for some time, without attempting to speak, looking down on the great field of human beings with an amused smile. It was curious to reflect that, by the distribution of power into so many hands, this mob was part of the foundation on which the great pinnacle of British supremacy was raised. As the candidate's eyes passed from one person to another each fell silent ; silence spread away from that solitary figure, standing in front of the platform, as from a radiating centre, until it beat up into the very corners of the room and the tumult subsided. Distinct utterances now became audible.

"Gee awd Pierson a chance."

"Let's hear what he's gannin' to dee."

"Wilt ta stop the machines?"

"Turn un 'oot, turn un 'oot."

A mass of men near the door rose simultaneously, and a kicking, struggling expostulator was vigorously ejected ; after this came comparative peace.

Mr. Pierson began to speak, according to his wont, very simply. He had been warned by the local association not to dwell much on Greater Britain, but to confine himself to anything which applied to local matters ; to claim that the Conservatives had performed what Radicals had only promised. He had listened to the advice without promising compliance.

He commented first on the inadequateness of the present party-labels. The Conservatives were no more stationary in their policy than the Liberals. We had long left behind the days when a statesman would dare to oppose anything in the nature of real progress. The great difference that lay between the parties could in no way be discovered in their names, for it was a difference in the basis from which each started. From a Conservative-Unionist point of view the Empire was regarded as one integral whole ; our colonies and dependencies were ever present, and any policy which took no account of them could only end in destroying the power of England herself, and her prosperity. When the Radical administrators attempted to belittle the Empire they forgot this. Where would England be ? What weight would her voice have in the great parliament of the civilised nations, in the politics of Europe, if her influence were confined wholly to these tiny islets ? What prosperity could her people enjoy if her trade were dependent only upon the forbearance of her enemies and rivals ?

This was very far from the strain in which he had been admonished to speak, and some of the local wire-pullers moved uneasily. How could a crew like the present understand these lofty ideas ? If he had told them that his side was sharp enough to sneak the tricks the Radicals had intended for themselves, they would at least have understood and applauded ; and

as for the better educated persons in the hall they were secured already, so why bother about them? Such were also the agent's views.

During the speech, which lasted for nearly an hour, Mr. Pierson was many times interrupted, but never perturbed or disconcerted, and the impression of power which he had given in private life seemed enlarged and accentuated in the presence of so great a gathering. He was a man to whom one unfailingly accorded respect, however much one's views, ethical or political, differed from his, for one felt instinctively that he acted on his own thought; the line of action which he followed was dictated not by fear or favour, but because to his mind and his temperament, it seemed advisable. Opposition would affect him very little; he might give it due weight in forming a judgment; but the mere fact of its existence as opposition would neither retard nor accelerate his progress toward a given object.

Among the principal people on the platform was Lady Aline Densley, who was in evening dress, but kept her cloak around her shoulders. The dress was white, the cloak dark coppery red, and the two colours were repeated in her white face and the red shade in her hair, and her large brown eyes. She was a woman who seemed effective because she knew how to emphasise the points of originality which marked her out from other women. She was treated with a deference that was almost absurd; whenever she turned to address a remark to a burly county magnate who sat a little behind her he jerked his fat body forward in his chair with an alacrity that threatened to precipitate him on to the ground—it was the deference not of courtesy but of obsequiousness. Once while Mr. Pierson was speaking Lord Pitholm scribbled something on a piece of paper, and handed it to his sister, who smiled and nodded acquiescence, and then it was passed on to the speaker. He read

it as he spoke and, twisting it up, turned to Lady Aline with a smile of acknowledgment.

Marion was watching the trivial byplay ; nothing is too trivial to escape the notice of a lover, and the slightest sign may be interpreted to mean the greatest of events by a person whose mind is in the proper key. Marion had seen that smile but once or twice herself, it seemed to her altogether too rare and precious for a public platform, and, what was far worse, it opened up the way for a possibility which had seemed unlikely a moment before. It interpreted to her Mr. Pierson's attitude of mind toward Lady Aline, and showed her a line of communication by which the two might grow to understand each other. Heretofore whatever gossip had whispered, Marion had been unable to find any one point common to the two or any quality which would attract the man to the woman. Now she had found it. There was a possible attitude of reverential admiration in which the man might stand toward the delicate high-bred girl ; her daintiness, her unapproachableness, the very incense offered at her shrine by the county magnates and their wives, might be an attraction to a man of Mr. Pierson's strong nature. The other side of the question had of course never been difficult for a woman to grasp. Men might have said that no girl of Aline's position could have cared for a man of the rough-hewn type in this case represented by Mr. Pierson, but to a woman, the fact of his power solved all difficulty. Power, find it when and where they will, is an irresistible magnet to woman ; it may bruise them eventually, and they may be incapable of realising the disadvantages, perhaps correlated with it, but they are universally attracted by it.

Lady Aline's great condescension in coming to a political meeting at all, still more in taking such an interested part in the election, had been a subject of comment in Marion's presence many times that day

she was tired of assenting to what seemed to her mere rubbish, and yet the topic was eagerly revived by a friend of Mrs. Beresford's, who was now sitting near.

"Isn't Lady Aline charming? She will do more good to Mr. Pierson's cause than any number of men, she has never before been known to take an interest in politics, and she is so reserved and reticent that her action is all the more forcible. How good it is of her!"

Jealousy is classed among the meaner of the vices, but at this moment Marion felt a wild pang. Would that she could have done anything for him comparable with what this girl was supposed to do by the mere fact of her presence! Talk of her goodness! why, it was her privilege. That insignificant chit was only important by reason of a title! How contemptible thus to fawn upon her! Marion wished the meeting would end, she hated to see those two in conjunction, so that many persons joined their names in a closer bond.

The heckling was of a very poor character, and easily disposed of; the candidate seemed disappointed that there was not more of it. He waited for questions, but none came. Then the proceedings terminated in the usual way, and the scramble and the boisterous noise began again.

The people on the platform broke up into groups. Lady Aline was surrounded by a throng of men. Marion stood apart on the lower level, with resentful pride in full blast. Here in this gossipy little place she was a nobody, she, who had proved her right to a place in the world, whose doings were chronicled in the society papers like those of royalty, here no one remembered her, while they fussed around this little pale-faced chit, who had been wrapped in cotton wool all her life and done nothing. What snobbery! It was the first real rebuff Marion had ever experienced,



and the sensation was stinging. She watched Mr. Pierson, who had freed himself from the men. Ah, after all he was no snob; it had been necessary for him, of course, to be polite to his girl hostess, but now he cared to speak to her no more, he knew the difference between intrinsic merit and a tinsel title! Yet as he passed the group Lady Aline with a slight movement separated herself from the rest, and, gathering up her cloak, looked at him with a question in her eyes. He went to her at once, and in doing so passed close by Marion, who bowed quickly. He started and saw her.

"Good-night, Miss Halsted; you came after all then?"

He had apparently not noticed her before, he who saw everything. He gave Lady Aline his arm, and led her out to her carriage. Marion was not made of so slight material as to show her bitterness to every onlooker, she chattered cheerfully during the drive home, even bringing her tongue to praise the girl she despised with a terrible contempt; she commented on the incidents of the meeting, and on the clearness of the night air with strained vivacity.

When at last she reached her room, she snapped off the gas, and flung the window wide open. It was a night of marvellous sweetness, and of a summer-like warmth. Toward the west there were welts of dark slate-grey cloud, with blurred edges as if softened by a wet finger, behind them was the half-moon, which shed a halo of radiant ripples on either side its hiding-place. The vault of the sky was perfectly clear, frosted with stars which seemed to start out in relief from their background of space in proportion to their brilliancy. The stealthy march of the heavens was almost visible, wheeling over the straight line drawn by the rigid parapet of the house. The air was so still that unusual sounds smote distinctly on the ear: the quick splashing of the beck

in the valley below, the cry of a constitutionally mournful owl, the groaning of a distant engine. Far off, between the feathery boughs of trees, Indian ink in hue, two fierce glowing lights burned; they were the furnaces of the neighbouring brick kilns, and they were like the fiery eyes of some blood-eating monster advancing slowly. It was a world of mysterious fascination unrivalled by any daytime beauty.

Marion leaned her bare elbows on the gritty window-sill, and for a while felt a savage pleasure in the pain of contact with the cold rough stone. She was suffering as she had never thought she could suffer, for the sake of a man, and she was fighting steadily to regain self-control.

She had been terribly mistaken: what she had imagined to be a great reciprocal attraction had been merely the effect of Mr. Pierson's wide mind and catholic sympathy, which had enabled him to understand her thoughts and follow her ideas. Doubtless every single woman of his acquaintance had experienced something of the same kind in his society, and in this lay the secret of the great fascination which he had for women.

Marion did not blink facts, she acknowledged she had been building on a foundation of sand, and yet she could not be wholly miserable, for after all she had found her ideal in life, even though it were afar off and she might never grasp it. The ideal had become real to her, and that does not happen to every one in a lifetime. She was also no weakling, and though suffering a bitter experience, she looked ahead and saw that love was not the only thing in life, even if it were greater than any other single thing.

Then after all was there not one chance more? Love is not born because of beauty nor of cleverness, but because the ego of one is mysteriously attracted to the ego of another in spite of all.

difficulty ; if indeed her soul had cried to his and been answered in a common tongue, then she was safe and could defy circumstance ; he might then be hidden by walls of society beauties, he might see riches and rank awaiting him, but he would desire her and her alone.

Hitherto Marion had blindly worshipped self ; that idol was now dethroned, and it was impossible for her not to feel a vague emptiness of heart, a certain instability, which gave to her manner a gentleness which had so far been lacking.

## CHAPTER XX.

### *BRICK END.*

"And hit out straight, 'tis your shortest plan,  
When against the ropes you're driven."

A. L. GORDON.

"It is settled, I speak myself."

"They're a rough lot," said the agent; "perhaps the sight of the candidate himself might irritate——"

"Have you never yet met a man who knows his own mind?" demanded Mr. Pierson.

He and his agent were standing on either side of the study table in Mr. Beresford's house, while Mr. Beresford and his son looked on at the brief contest with amusement.

"It's all very well to know your own mind, Pierson," exclaimed the former; "but you don't know Brick End. There is an ungodly set of ruffians there. We mustn't leave them uncanvassed for the sake of our own credit, but it will be like pouring out a teacup full of warm water to melt a glacier. So why should you go yourself?"

Mr. Pierson made a whimsical face. "I've had no fun yet, Beresford, and I've made up my mind to have a little now."

"Well, well, we'll support you, of course. For Heaven's sake, Ker, don't let it get to Marion's ears, for if she knows there's danger she'll make straight for it."

"She seems to share my own temperament," remarked Mr. Pierson.

An hour or two later, Marion, quite unconscious of what had been hidden from her, passed through the hall on her way to lunch with Miss Pierson. She found the sweet morning air refreshing after the long strain of the weary night, and the tension of her mind relaxed as the wheels of her bicycle ran over the smooth clean road to Skye Cottage.

When she arrived there she was taken round to the kennels at once, where she found Miss Pierson seated on the ground within a wired enclosure, almost lost to sight amid the multitude of her pets. Long-haired, long-bodied, bright-eyed Skye terriers climbed over her, snuggling into her neck, playfully pulling down her hair, and almost pushing her over in the exuberance of their affection. She was surrounded by a halo of waving plumy tails. At the end of the yard, in attendance stood a satellite, Jake, a lad of fourteen, with legs so bowed that they completed the circle. He was Miss Pierson's faithful henchman, and the dogs' devoted attendant.

The picture was quaint enough to merit reproduction, and Marion was so much struck by it that she would willingly have waited unseen, but a clamorous confusion of deafening barks announced that her presence had been recognised by doggie senses.

Miss Pierson struggled to her feet, stilling the uproar with authoritative voice.

"Do come in, Miss Halsted; I'm so glad to see you. They won't touch you."

Marion obeyed.

"I wish you would sit down again," she said. "It is so odd to see them crawling all over you."

"They won't approach me unless I allow it," said Miss Pierson proudly. "It is always said ironically that an old maid's children are the best trained, and here it is no theoretical saying; these are my children. Oh, you darlings, come to your mother."

She sank down once more, and was quickly

enveloped in waves of pepper and salt hair, glossy and well brushed.

"You needn't keep aloof. We haven't a flea among us," said Miss Pierson, from the midst, with an outspokenness that smacked of the stable yard, "not to speak of anything more objectionable. We don't deal in such things."

Marion laughed, and commented on the fact that with all their freedom the dogs did not attempt to lick their mistress's face and hands.

"No indeed. It is a rare treat for them to kiss me. See, I will show you how my children know and love me. Go away, you naughty boys," and she brushed them off. They retreated, crestfallen, crouching down with doubtfully wagging tails and beseeching eyes, smiling plaintive queries as to whether this were jest or earnest.

"Now, Iona and Mull, come here and put your heads on my shoulder."

Two of the long-haired brigade advanced timidly, waving horizontal tails, and stopped within a yard.

"Come on, you babies, and 'put head,'" cried their mistress, bursting into boisterous laughter. In an instant they were all upon her again. "No, no, go away, go back, you naughties!"

Down they crouched, this time mournfully certain of wrongdoing.

"Now, Iona, Mull, come along—no, not you," with forbidding hand to another claimant. "'Put head.' Good boys!"

This time she achieved her purpose, and the two honoured ones laid broad submissive heads on her shoulders, holding themselves stiffly in position.

"There, oh, you darling!" She hugged one of them as she bounded to her feet, and the others danced around, in a perfect hailstorm of pepper and salt. She held up Mull for Marion's inspection.

"Isn't he an angel? Just a year. They're all

jealous of him. You know you are, you sillies: I'm going to show him shortly."

The dog peered at Marion with brilliant eyes through a fringe of hair, then looked again at his mistress, intent on every expression of her face.

Marion showered caresses on him. "I don't wonder you love him. It is a splendid hobby," she said appreciatively.

"They are my children. Now you must see the puppies, quite babies. There—did you ever?"

A sprawling clump of dark-coloured hair was thrust into Marion's face; it was soft as butter, ungainly as a bear cub. Her enthusiasm pleased Miss Pierson, who cried, "I knew you would love them," and then her self-conceit, which had seemed to be for a time in abeyance, came forth in full flood. Her dogs had taken prizes everywhere, she said, they were much superior to any one's else; of course this was mainly owing to herself; her methods were quite original. She subtly introduced many compliments from judges at shows, and from rival breeders, under the guise of information; but beneath it all there was plainly an overflowing tenderness of heart where animals were concerned, a tenderness that apparently had been dammed up in more human channels than the volume in this might be the greater. Miss Pierson spoke of children as messy, troublesome little things, and frankly announced she was devoid of human affection. She exhibited her little servitor to Marion as a humorous freak, a view heartily shared by the boy himself, who grinned at his own grotesqueness. It was not until lunch was actually in progress that she alluded to her brother and the election.

"I would like him to get in as he wishes to," she said. "I like every one to be happy in their own way; but personally his success or defeat does not affect me at all. I ought perhaps to have canvassed for him; but how could I? I know nothing about

politics. You'll say that is not of much consequence, what is needed is simply unbounded tact ; yes, in that sense I might of course have been useful. I don't suppose you would make a good canvasser, you are too straight-forward."

"I think the militant side of politics attracts me more than the persuasive."

"You are like my brother. Are you going to support him at Brick End this afternoon?"

Marion knew nothing of it.

"No? Stephen was talking of it at breakfast. It is a singularly rough and Radical district, and the agent, Mr. Richards, wanted some of the supporters to speak instead, as they would not provoke so much hostility as the candidate ; but of course Stephen insisted when he heard that."

"How far is it, Miss Pierson?"

"I suppose seven or eight miles ; I once went there after a dog. The meeting was to be early, it is a kind of half-day with the men, and they leave work about three." Her attention flew to an old dog, almost blind, who alone was privileged to come into the dining-room. "Poor old fellow, did ums then?" she said, feeding him with bits of meat. "This is my eldest son, the first Skye I ever had," she continued. "He is about sixteen, and nearly at the end ; but we won't talk of such horrid things, will we? He's going to live as long again, and be with missus when she is an old, old woman."

It had come into Marion's mind that her uncle and Ker had been concealing something from her, and that it was doubtless relating to this meeting at Brick End ; whereupon she burned to go, if it were only to look on from afar, and after lunch she asked if there were a county map in the house, for the project of attending the meeting had already taken form in her mind. There was, however, no map of any sort to be found, nor indeed any book at all excepting show



catalogues, monographs on Skye Terriers, or on dog breeding in general, until Miss Pierson suddenly bethought herself of her brother's room, and made her way to it; here there were piles of books, and Marion, who had followed, looked at them with interest. She noted that close by the bed on a chair lay a French edition of Victor Hugo's "*Les Misérables*"; and the fact that Mr. Pierson, in the heat of an election, could read Victor Hugo before going to sleep, struck her as curious and characteristic; but she had no time to make any further discoveries before Miss Pierson found a suitable county map, and gave it to her.

Brick End consisted chiefly of brick kilns. It is true there was a straggling line of cottages in a field a quarter of a mile away, but the beehive ovens and the red-tiled roofs of the sheds were the conspicuous elements of the place. These stood on the side of a steeply sloping hill, out of which the clay had been dug and cut away until it came dangerously near the foundations of the buildings themselves. The excavation was a great yawning chasm, differing from a quarry in that it lacked a quarry's clean-cut edges of rock, its sheer precipitous sides and bold outlines. This was in a horse-shoe shape, and on one side the ground had slipped away, vomiting masses of slime, in which were buried at intervals portions of the upper turf, half-submerged green tufts, suggesting the scalps of a race of green-haired men, buried alive in a quagmire of oozy filth, under a new version of the *Inferno*. The work on this side had been abandoned, as the soil was not stiff enough for brick-making, so it remained as it had slipped, a veritable abomination of desolation. On the other part of the horse-shoe the clay was firmer, and bore the imprint of the bricks cut from it, terraces for the wheelbarrows, and platforms for the workers. The place looked quiet, but was in reality a centre of activity. A single line of rails curved round above the works, and on these

the trucks conveying the finished bricks plied to and fro.

On the afternoon of the day in question the workmen were leaving early, and as they broke away from the buildings in groups of twos and threes they swarmed up the slope to the higher ground near the upper edge of the quarry, where Mr. Pierson and half a score of his supporters were waiting to address them.

There were no elements of formality about the meeting. The candidate stood on no platform, his own height and the slight rise of the ground giving him all the advantage that was necessary. The men, who with laugh and coarse jest clustered round, were clay-coloured from top to toe, boots and faces alike yellow with the earth in which they had wallowed. The red handkerchiefs in which some carried their empty dinner saucers, and which others had loosely knotted round their throats, were the only contrasting note of colour.

From the very first, signs of hostility were apparent. From a hundred to one hundred and fifty brickworkers were present, men with heavy faces and lowering brows, all with sullen eyes. Even the lads, miniature men, in their garb of yellow, had a convict-like stare. They had come to bully not to listen. Derisive personal remarks, and foul language, linked the groups as they approached, and these grew gradually into threats of violence as the men formed a dense mass by the speaker. Jeering imitations of his words were made by those in the front rank. In vain Mr. Pierson argued, striving to catch one sign of open-mindedness, one gleam of intelligence, the expression of one man who might be influenced. The meeting, such as it was, went on in a tumult from beginning to end.

Some of the lads held stones furtively, but at first no violence was attempted. At length the brickworkers became irritated by the persistence of the man who would not be silenced. The more boisterous

of their number surged forward, pushing those in front almost on the top of the political party. A lad at the back flung half a brick, which missed the group, and, rebounding on the turf, went with a smack over the edge of the quarry thirty or forty yards away, and fell into the slime below. This suggested a method of attack congenial to the roughs.

Hitherto no one of them had cared to be the first to offer violence, for all had been cowed by the fearlessness of the educated men whom they faced. Now some one shouted, "Run 'em into the quarry." This suited all, for it was a game which all could play without any one's being personally singled out. It was a combined movement, and the bully does not love individual action. With derisive shouts the group spread itself into a crescent, to head off all exits, except the way to the quarry edge. The men at the back flung themselves forward, hurling on by their weight their less willing comrades in front. One of the latter, driven by a vigorous push, charged straight into Mr. Pierson's arms with a terrific shock, and before recovering himself was floored by Ker, who had not had time to forget the pugnacity of his school days. This was the signal for a general *mêlée*.

Every one knows that the first open blow in a mob charged with the spirit of mischief is the percussion cap, the spark, to set all ablaze. The man nearest to the fallen one was sent by those behind headforemost over his prostrate comrade, and another dealt a swinging lunge with his dinner-can at the M.P. of a neighbouring division, who, luckily, stepped back in time to avoid having his head split open. The two who had fallen crawled out, and, regaining their legs, joined the *mêlée* from behind, considering that they had done enough to prove their valour in the front. Others, however, were of different metal; the man who had used the dinner-can was no physical coward. He struck and hit indiscriminately, wielding his tin

can with brutal determination, and kicking where he could not hit. Another great thunderous-faced fellow, with a jowl like a hippopotamus, butted head first at Mr. Beresford with such effect that the little man was knocked over like a ninepin. The assailant, recovering himself, caught the aristocratic secretary a crack on the cheek that drew blood. The impulse had been at first toward a bloodless victory, but now the note of battle deepened, and the scrimmage turned to deadly warfare.

The members of the party attacked had involuntarily given back a little at the first savage onslaught, but now they realised the danger of such retreat. The edge of the quarry, which they had neared, was that on which the landslip had occurred. There would, it is true, not be much physical danger in falling back over it, it would mean at the worst a headlong tumble into the glutinous quagmire, a bathe in liquid glue. Yet the humiliation and ludicrousness of such a defeat would be almost worse than physical risk, and in this immunity from serious consequences the attackers, who would not have dared to do anything which might bring the law upon them, pushed their advantage mercilessly.

Mr. Pierson had hitherto acted chiefly on the defensive; he knew the danger of his own huge strength, and was habitually chary of using it; now, at a warning cry from his young secretary, he saw the peril and that the necessity for action had come.

In every plucky Englishman there lies, deep down, the fierce lust of combat, it may be kept in check, overlaid and controlled, but once force him into a position in which his conscience clears him of striking unadvisedly, he will throw aside all qualms in the fierce joy of battle. This moment had come for Mr. Pierson. He struck out straight and hard, right and left, and was invigorated by each blow as if he drank deep draughts of vital energy, for a moment the unexpected

fury of his onslaught repelled the advance and turned the tide.

He laughed aloud. None of his adherents had ever seen him in this mood. "Come on," he shouted "we'll give you a lesson ; ten to one, yes, twenty to one, if you like !"

But the call found response in other breasts than those of his own side ; the men attacking heard it too, and it awoke something in them they had not known before, something which might have been trained and drilled to make England's enemies shrink from them.

They came on in an overwhelming flood, their numbers were too strong for the previous diversion to be permanent. Those who fell were quickly replaced ; the half-hearted had by this time wedged themselves to the back, the men who were not cowards had gained the front, and become utterly reckless.

The *mêlée* was prodigious.

Foot by foot the attacking party advanced, driving the politicians back with semi-circular sweep. The distance to be traversed lessened ominously, defeat stared the lesser party in the face.

"If we have to go we'll take some of them along with us," said Pierson grimly ; but already he saw himself daubed with clay, and wading in it, up to the waist, for the amusement of a capering, hooting mob, who danced on terra firma above. The ridicule would be a deadly blow at the success of his cause. The sweat streamed down little Beresford's face as he capered about, fighting like a game terrier, snapping and snarling. Hats were lost, coats torn, blood ran down from cuts, adding to the disabled appearance of the defendants. The brickmen redoubled their efforts, one more rally and they would be victorious.

Suddenly there was a yell from one of those at the back, followed by a succession of yells and an immediate relief of pressure.

The sharp tinging of an alarm bell close at hand

was succeeded by a scramble backwards, and at a speed of about eighteen miles an hour a lady on a bicycle shot down the smooth slope, heading directly for the congested mass. Instinct is a powerful solvent at such moments. A single bicycle, even at that speed, could not have done much to dissipate such a crowd, but the instinct of each separate individual composing the crowd was to get out of the way as quickly as possible. Instead of being directed to the matter in hand, each man's thoughts ran to the expected shaft hurtling toward him as if from a bow, and with extraordinary celerity each individual freed himself and started away, leaving a clear lane between attackers and attacked down which the bicycle might shoot. At the end of the lane thus conveniently formed was the edge of turf which marked the pit-fall, over which it had been designed to thrust the political party.

Marion had ridden in from the road, seen the group below, and intended to ride gently toward it. She had back-pedalled forcibly on the slope, until all at once her chain broke. She had no brake; and the next instant she was flying madly toward the scrimmage. She rang vigorously, and kept her balance, but did not realise the double danger, until the men suddenly parted and the yawning edge gaped before her. Then frantically she leapt to save herself, landing headlong in the midst of the group. The machine bounded with a crash over the edge into the clay, and she, driven by the acquired impetus, was unable to keep her feet, and would have plunged head first after it. As it happened a massive obstacle intervened, and she came right into Mr. Pierson's arms, with a shock that almost felled him, and completely stunned her.

The mood of the combatants changed. They gave a spasmodic cheer, which subsided when they saw the lady lying senseless on the short grass. Hostilities

were perforce at an end. Ker hurried away to get some water, a few of the brickmen had the delicacy to move off, though the remainder stayed, making audible remarks. A couple of them scrambled down to unearth from its clay bed the damaged machine.

"Eh, he's a grond mon that," said one of those who had stayed, admiringly regarding Pierson. "'Twould ha' mashed thee, Jock."

"What an extraordinary occurrence," said one of the sub-agents aside to Mr. Castle. "Who is this lady? Did she do it on purpose? Gad, I never was in such a tight place in my life! Good job the chief's such a thundering strong chap!"

Marion opened her eyes as her uncle bent over her, and the next minute began to cry hysterically, whereat the brickmen considerably drew away. Her nerve was quite shattered, and even the presence of strangers could not restrain the tears. Ker returned with brandy and water, and after it she felt a little better; but yet she could not stop crying, and with quivering lips whispered to Mr. Beresford to take her home instantly.

"Come, come," he said jocularly, "'all's well that ends well.' But for your sudden intervention, we should have been, like the fellow in the nursery rhyme who went to Gloucester, up to our middles in that muck, swearing ourselves hoarse. It's the funniest electioneering occurrence I've ever seen; broad farce isn't in it."

Even Marion joined a trifle hysterically in the laughter that followed, but she could not bring herself to speak aloud or look up, or to allude to the circumstance, even on the way home. On arrival at the house she fled to her own room, refusing all offers of assistance; and she writhed when she heard Ker giving his version of the story to his sisters in the passage. They declared that it was the only political meeting they had ever heard of that was any fun, and that they deeply regretted not having been there.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *IN THE GREENHOUSE*

"It is power  
I give, and power is precious. It is strength  
To live four-square, careless of outward shows  
And self-sufficing."

LEWIS MORRIS.

THE variable weather proved its character the next day by a veritable deluge. The morning was one continuous dreary downpour. Marion stayed upstairs until nearly lunch-time. She was bruised and shaken, but this was not the sole reason for her inaction: the greater one was that she desired to avoid the chance of meeting Mr. Pierson and any of the men who had witnessed her ridiculous accident, for her dignity was sorely hurt.

The rain continued after luncheon, to the intense disgust of the Beresford girls, who had been going to play hockey.

"Football is not stopped by rain," Marion suggested; "perhaps the game of hockey may not be."

"It is a very important match, one of the semi-finals in our cup ties," said Amy.

"If I were you I would go in any case, even if just to see what is going to happen," Marion went on.

Her cousins accepted the advice with delight, and shortly after drove off in smart white mackintosh coats. Mrs. Beresford emerged from the drawing-room as the sound of the dog-cart wheels on the gravel grew fainter. She made no comment, she



never interfered with her daughters, but her expression showed that she considered them lunatics to face the rain.

"I am going to get a book and go down to the greenhouse," said Marion. "It makes a little change."

She selected a monograph on the rarer kinds of book-binding, and, armed with a big umbrella, retired to the haunt she had indicated.

She was pale and her eyes were heavy, she felt sodden and moist in spirit. She wanted to forget politics, and all the jarring notes of her struggling soul, and steep herself in some extraneous subject; but she could not pin her thoughts to the book, and after a time she tried no more, but lit a cigarette, and lay back in the sloping deck-chair, hearing the dripping of the rain on the roof, and contemplating the long line of pure and stately arum lilies opposite.

There was an unpleasant thought beating at her mind for entrance. She had proved clearly enough that Mr. Pierson was not in love with her. She had made a ridiculous object of herself in his sight. Was it not time to efface herself, and vanish from the scene? It was a weakness to linger on merely for the pleasure of seeing him, and she had not heretofore found such weaknesses in herself.

Could she go away now and leave him, without further intercourse, trusting that "if it were to be it would be"? She discovered that it was beyond her power. After indulging her fancies unrestrained for thirty years, the controlling hand of self-respect could not guide her away from her wishes at a moment's notice.

The grinding of the gravel beneath a foot interrupted her thoughts, the handle of the door turned and Mr. Pierson himself entered. He did not apologise for his intrusion as many men would have done, and, in spite of the sudden catch in her breath, Marion was the first to speak.

"Fancy your finding time to bestow on a greenhouse," she said chaffingly.

"I have a few minutes until Castle brings me a telegram. I told him to find me here."

"Aren't you going to smoke?"

"I will, if I may beg one of your cigarettes."

She handed him her case.

"I came to find out if you were any the worse for yesterday," he said, as he selected one and lit it.

"A little shaken—it was rather abrupt. I hoped I had not hurt you."

With great discomposure she felt the blood creeping into her cheeks, and wondered if it were visible.

"It would take a great deal of that sort of thing to hurt me," he answered, smiling. "Besides, I must thank you; you saved us in the only way possible; but for you, we should have suffered a most ignominious defeat."

"It was not planned beforehand," she said, laughing a little in spite of the strong emotion she was feeling. It was wonderful how her mental barometer rose in his presence.

"If I had inferred that, I should have inferred that you risked your neck for us."

"I don't think it is in me to risk my neck for any one," she said a little wearily.

He looked at her. It was quite clear that he understood she was in a different mood from any which he had yet seen, and, man-like, he attributed it wholly to a physical cause. "You are upset and shaken to-day, and take a depressed view of the universe, including yourself," he said judicially.

She smiled. How precious, how infinitely precious in the abyss of time were these few minutes spent alone with him!

There was a long pause, almost as sweet as conversation, and then she hazarded:

"Do you think you really know me, Mr. Pierson?"

"As well as one ever knows a woman;" but the words were spoken playfully, not seriously.

"What should you say was the keynote of my character?"

"An intense vitality," he answered promptly, as if he had often considered the matter.

"That is hardly a keynote. What is yours?"

"I have not thought about it. Self-mastery is the dominating idea."

"In what way?"

"Self-mastery first, before money, power, influence. If I desire a thing too much, I beware of it, it is dangerous to self-mastery."

"I envy you if you have really attained that."

"Why should you? A woman does not need the same discipline as a man, her vagaries and whims are supposed to be her charm."

"Mr. Pierson!"

"I only said 'supposed to be,'" he answered, with a twinkle in his eye.

She reverted to his previous statement, feeling instinctively that he had spoken of something deep down in himself revealed to few.

"It is a new idea to me. You mean you deliberately set aside anything which threatens to disturb the balance of your faculties, the control of your powers?"

"Yes, I mean that."

"My line has been exactly the opposite; I have always sought for sensation, been delighted at finding anything which had the power to carry me out of myself," she mused. "Yet——"

"Well?"

"You *have* all these supposititiously discarded things—wealth, power."

"They came because I did not greatly care."

"But people say——"

"What do people say?"

"That you are a man of pleasure," she replied, steadily meeting his eyes.

He turned away. "If I found what men call pleasure dominate me I would give it up."

"Yet," she went on, with a feverish desire to make the most of this one chance, "you do enjoy things keenly. At that dance—I only use this small instance as an example—you remember you were as happy as a schoolboy."

"So I was."

"But you say——"

"The phrase you used sufficiently answers the question: there is nothing in wholesome schoolboy enjoyment to dominate one; in that sense I enjoy almost everything."

"Is your mind set on winning this election?"

"I don't greatly care."

"Yet if you got in you would probably throw yourself most energetically into your Parliamentary work."

"Yes, I should like that."

"I don't think it is a state of mind altogether enviable."

He supplied a query.

"The frame of mind induced by complete self-mastery, it merely means you don't care much about anything."

"Isn't that the state of being which the wisest men of all ages have set before us as an ideal?"

"It is inhuman, colourless; but, forgive me, I think you are a fraud; you may strive after that blissful state but you most certainly have not attained your ideal."

"Few people do."

"Tell me of the instances where you have failed."

He twisted a flower to pieces with an irritated gesture she had never seen him use before.

"Do you want me to lay my life completely bare

to you?" There was something stern in the tone. He was changed, the outward aspect of bonhomie had deserted him.

She felt almost a sensation of fear. "Forgive me," she said quickly; "the passion for dissection is my besetting sin, I did not mean to be so ruthlessly inquisitive."

"I spoke in a tone which implied rebuke when I meant none. There is nothing to forgive. I meant no more than my literal words. Is it of any interest to you to see the inner side of my life, the side which no one knows?"

"I want to know nothing that you would rather not tell me."

He considered, and then smiled in the old natural way.

"One thing which my philosophy has never been able to overcome is the humiliation of my own origin, my want of birth. I would gladly change places with my own secretary."

She was amazed. Of all men she had least suspected him of this sensitiveness. Her face expressed her astonishment.

He seemed amused. "I'm glad it has been so well concealed," he said.

"But you can hardly call that an instance of want of self-mastery," she objected.

"No, it is rather a weak spot in the armour."

"If that is the only one——"

"No, it is not——" He looked at her in silence charged with meaning. She felt that he was on the brink of speaking of some circumstance which had been the keynote of his life, something which would explain all that had hitherto been enigmatical in him; yet that speech was a rending effort she also knew, for he was moved as she had never seen him moved. It was probable that the fact to which he strove to give utterance had never been confided to

any one before, and was overlaid with the unbreakable reserve of years.

As she waited, distant steps struck on her ear ; they drew nearer, and Castle appeared in the doorway. Marion experienced a keen and bitter disappointment. The propitious moment was gone, perhaps never to return, now she should never hear what she so greatly longed to know.

Castle entered, holding a telegram in one hand and the local weekly papers, published that day, in the other. Mr. Pierson turned to him abruptly and took the message without speaking. Marion held out her hand for the papers. For some reason Mr. Castle withheld them.

"I was going to—I brought them for—I mean Mr. Pierson may perhaps want to——" said the young man with even more than his usual nervousness ; Marion was surprised, her action had been merely mechanical.

"Nonsense, Castle," said Mr. Pierson, taking his secretary by the arm, "we can get others as we go along ; they are not such precious stuff," and he handed the papers to Marion as he led the young man off.

The Radical sheet lay uppermost on Marion's knee, and, as the door closed, her eye fell on the heading of a column in large type :

#### **GALLANT RESCUE BY A LADY.**

**AN ADONIS IN PERIL.**

Thence followed a highly coloured and vulgarly garbled account of the incident of the preceding day.

Marion's cheeks flamed as she read sarcastic allusions to the personal attractions of the Conservative candidate, which had caused a beautiful damsel to run straight into his arms after careering down the sward, astride the modern iron steed.

"From this incident, when our respected opponent was not ashamed to shelter himself behind petticoats, we may augur his probable conduct in Parliament should the electorate be foolish and ill-advised enough to send him there," continued the illogical and illiterate little paper.

But the Conservative organ was not much better. The vulgarity of the tone jarred savagely. Here the matter was turned into a jest. "Though yet without votes the fair sex are not without influence, and our candidate may congratulate himself on having shown that that influence is on his side; his manly and prompt action also as rescuer of the lady, who had thus put herself in peril for his sake, will not be thrown away on her sisters, who are ever ready to admire strength and courage in man."

Marion writhed, picturing Mr. Pierson reading these versions as he drove along.

The rain ceased about four o'clock, and the evening, though sullen and damp, was not cold. In spite of its uninviting appearance, or perhaps because of it, Marion asked Ker to come for a stroll down the garden after dinner. She was very fond of Ker, she knew him to be loyal and true; between him and herself there struck that note of cousinship which is hardly inferior to the closer tie of brothership.

He made no difficulty, and fetched a wrap for her without expostulation. They strolled slowly along the wet gravel beneath the dripping trees. Marion had an object in thus bringing him out, she wanted to have him to herself, a process difficult of accomplishment in the house. She had been thinking of Mr. Pierson's desire to do something for the boy, and had made up her mind to give him a present of five pounds herself, hardly admitting that it was an intense pleasure to her to be thus fulfilling the wishes of "some one else" at her own cost.

She opened the subject at once. "Does Uncle

Sidney treat you any better in the way of pocket-money, Ker?"

"No. What made you ask me now?"

"I have meant to ask you for some time, but there have been so many other things to occupy one's attention."

"He isn't a bad sort, the governor," said the boy presently. "But of course he thinks a lot more of the girls than me, and he thinks a fellow doesn't want money; he always says, 'What would you do with it if you had it? Only fritter it away.'"

"Poor old boy."

"It is rather hard luck, you know. Both the girls have good allowances."

"They are older than you."

"Yes, but a man wants money more than a girl. You know, Marion, I have to ask father for every sixpence, if I want my hair cut or have to put the trap up in the town."

"Doesn't your mother give you something?"

"Sometimes; but she's too good to give it me without telling him, and then there's a row, and of course I don't like that. You see it isn't as if I should be poor all my life, I shall be well-off some day."

"See," said Marion, "there's something I've been carrying about in my pocket for you."

"Oh, I say, Marion!"

"Don't say, put it away."

"But I can't, you know; after all you're a girl. One can't take money from a girl, and such a lump too—five pounds. I've never had so much at once in my life."

"It makes no difference to me, and believe me, Ker, it gives me the greatest pleasure; you won't deny me that?"

But she had more difficulty in making him yield than she had anticipated, and even when she had won her way, he kept breaking out into expostulatory



phrases at intervals. She made him promise inviolable secrecy, then changed the conversation by a sharp question.

"Do you like Mr. Pierson, Ker?"

"Like him? He's a rattling good chap."

"Did you know him before he was a candidate?"

"I've met him, but not often. I've been away at school, you see. Do you like him?"

"He's clever and interesting."

"He likes you more than a little."

Her heart gave a sudden leap.

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, any fellow can see that with half an eye. He looks at you so, and talks to you; why, you must have noticed it yourself."

She shook her head.

"But don't you care for him at all?"

The imperative need for utterance, which sometimes seizes even a strong woman, seized Marion now. She looked at the boy's frank face, which was a little above the level of her own, and cried in passionate affirmation:

"I love him."

The rapture of the admission seemed to communicate itself in a kind of subtle thrill to the dim atmosphere about them.

"You in love?" said Ker, in an awestruck tone. "I thought you never had been in love in your life."

"Nor was I in all my life until now."

Ker was the only human being in the world to whom she had confided the momentous secret. Not to Philip nor to Gwen had it been whispered. There had been something in Ker's frankness, in the absence of a critical attitude which had lured her on; in only that one moment had confession been easy, she could not have spoken thus before or after.

"Well, I am beat," said Ker. "You ought to be the happiest couple going."

Her grasp tightened on his arm. "But he doesn't care for me in the least."

He laughed scornfully. "Tell it to the marines."

"But I have proof. If he does care, why has he not told me so? There is nothing to prevent it."

"Perhaps he daren't. You have rather a stand-off manner, you know."

"Oh, Ker, I have shown him again and again."

"He thinks you're only kind, or like him as a friend, or some rot of that sort."

"No, no, he is very determined; if he had wanted me, nothing of that kind would have deterred him."

"Yet, you see, Marion, it's awkward for him. Of course, he's very rich and so on; but he's not equal to you, he's much older for one thing, and then he isn't a gentleman by birth."

A sudden lightening of what before was dim took place in Marion's heart: had the confession in the greenhouse been but the prelude to something else?

"I could fling my arms round your neck and kiss you here, dear boy," she cried. "And yet I can't quite believe it."

"I know my own sex," said Ker sententiously, ignoring the possible prospect of a kiss.

"But you said the other day that he was a flirt, that he was in love with Lady Aline, that he had a wife already."

"I hadn't really seen you together then."

"If what you say is true, perhaps he never will propose. I can't give him more encouragement than I have done."

"He is not the man to risk a refusal."

She continued walking in thoughtful silence. If she could only believe all this! She had not realised how depressed and hopeless she had been, until hope rushed in like a flood.

"Oh, Ker," she cried, in a sudden revulsion of feeling, "how good and rich and beautiful life is!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### *AN ENCOUNTER WITH A DRUNKEN PITMAN.*

"Mere pluck, though not in the least sublime,  
Is wiser than blank dismay."

A. L. GORDON.

FATE so willed it that the candidate himself turned up at the Beresfords' the next day, which was Saturday, for lunch, and Marion had to face him whether she wished it or not. However, he seemed perfectly unconscious of anything unusual in the relations between them, and his ease and self-possession gradually quieted her restlessness. He talked mainly to his host, at one time entering upon a hot argument on the merits of the pitmen, based upon a sweeping remark of Mr. Beresford's that as a class they were quite untrustworthy.

"There I differ from you," said Mr. Pierson. "There are splendid fellows amongst them, and I can speak with authority, being one of them myself," he added, laughing. "You underestimate the odds they have to fight against."

"Well, look at that last ballot, ninety per cent. for continuing the strike, yet every decent fellow you speak to admits he is anxious to resume work. I can't square the facts at all."

"I was speaking to Hetherington's manager the other day, and he says the union officials know very well which way a man votes, and it is marked up against him."

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"Even so——"

"I once knew a man who dared to dispute some decree of the union, and he was—well—smashed, literally and figuratively," said Mr. Pierson.

"I don't want them to stand up against the whole force of the union, but these men, who profess to be so willing, should get work elsewhere; it is only your pits that are out."

"Quite impossible; there is not an overman in the county who would dare to take them on, every man in his own colliery would give in his notice immediately."

"Pooh!"

"Come, Beresford, there are many men about here who openly speak their minds, who hold their own opinions, who dare to be independent in spite of all odds, and you must admit that requires courage of no ordinary kind!"

After lunch, as Marion was crossing the hall, Mr. Pierson stopped her. "I should like you to read that correspondence and give me your opinion on it," he said, handing her a few newspaper cuttings and a typewritten letter, signed by himself. The cuttings were letters from the local paper endorsed, "A Friendly Enemy."

"Read them when you find time," he said. "Tomorrow evening will do for the post."

She assented gladly, and proceeded to read them at once, but she was interrupted by a maid, who came to tell her that a little girl was waiting to see her with a message at the back door. Marion went instantly, and returned with an indignant face.

"What do you think?" she cried, to the two men in the hall. "That brute Rawson has ill-treated his grandmother, and no one dare do anything for her. The mother of the child who has come to me went to help her, and was turned out of the house, so she has sent the little girl running all the way here to find me. I am going at once."

"But how?" asked Ker and Mr. Pierson simultaneously.

She paused, remembering her smashed bicycle. "On one of the girls' machines."

"You mustn't go alone." It was Mr. Pierson who spoke, having followed her to the foot of the stairs. She was standing above him, and looked down upon him.

"Mustn't?" she asked.

"Mustn't," he repeated emphatically. "That brute may set on you for entering the house. I know him well, he was dismissed from the Duntail colliery before the strike; his case caused some friction."

"You would have me leave an old woman to die?" Marion asked seriously, bending forward.

"No, but I would not have you go alone. I would take care of you myself if I were not now due at a meeting I can't shirk, but your cousin will drive you."

"There is not a thing in the stables," Ker exclaimed, "except the trap which is getting ready for you."

"Then," said Mr. Pierson, "I will drive you in that, and the meeting must take care of itself."

"That is impossible, you know it is." But she was pleased at his earnestness. "Besides, the difficulty is not so insurmountable. Ker has a bicycle, he can go with me."

"If I can fettle it up," said the boy, using the north country idiom. "I haven't looked at it for six weeks."

"There!" Marion touched Mr. Pierson's arm lightly with her finger-tips. "Are you satisfied?"

"Not altogether, but I suppose it is the best that can be done. I shall be uneasy until I know you have returned safely."

When Marion came down equipped a few minutes later he had already gone.

"I think my machine will do," said Ker; "I have blown it up. I can't ride Amy's, it's too ridiculously low."

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However, his hopes were too sanguine. They had not gone a mile upon the way when a loud crack announced the bursting of a well-worn tyre. Ker uttered a bad word, and tried energetically to go on riding on the flat back wheel; this succeeded for only a few hundred yards, then the valve came loose and bumped each time the wheel turned and he had to give it up. He implored Marion to wait and walk with him, but she only laughed and rode on. Ruefully cursing, Ker left the bicycle in the hedge, and started off after her on foot.

Marion reached the lonely row of cottages without mishap, and knocking, entered the house, not considering whether she were afraid. The sense of her own class and superiority was innate in her, and if she had ever thought about it, she would have frankly admitted that she quite expected to quell a drunken pitman by the superior power of an educated eye.

She did shrink from dirt, disorder, and foulness, however, and, when she entered the house, with its sickly smell of stale food, she shuddered. Then her compassion overcame squeamishness.

Mrs. Rawson lay in a filthy nightgown on the uneven floor, moaning, the long tails of grey hair were wafted about with the draught from the door, and she beat her skinny hands feebly with a kind of automatic motion. A more loathsome and repulsive object there was not in nature. It was not natural to Marion to nurse the sick as it is to some women, but it was characteristic of her to do whatever had to be done with energy. Rolling up the blue-checked counterpane, she made a pillow for the grey head, and flinging a blanket over the old woman, she bent down and made her take some of the brandy and water she had brought with her. It was a long time before this had much effect, but at last signs of returning animation appeared. Then Marion set the disordered bed to rights, and, overcoming sickening

nausea, lifted the skinny old woman, blankets and all, upon the bed. It was no light task—for, though incredibly thin, Mrs. Rawson was a big-boned woman—and Marion panted at its accomplishment. But there was still much to be done. She expected the doctor shortly, having sent the little girl on to him with a note, before leaving her own house, but until he came precious time must not be wasted. There was a cut and a big bruise on one side of Mrs. Rawson's forehead, which further disfigured her. Finding no fragment of rag in the house, Marion bathed this wound with her own handkerchief, and then bound it up, and as she did so the glazed eyes which had watched her with a half-idiotic expression, showed more intelligence, and the woman spoke.

"I hanna hed bite nor sup since yester' mornin'," she said.

This had not been foreseen; Marion had brought nothing with her. In place of anything better she found some bits of stale bread in the cupboard and soaked them in the brandy and water, and fed her patient. As she did so she looked round the intolerably dreary room with its great fireplace choked with black and grey ash, which to one familiar with the habits of pit-people spoke volumes of neglect.

Mrs. Rawson became more communicative under the influence of the sop.

"I gettened oop to get a bite this mornin'," she said in a weak, complaining tone, "and fell and hit ma heed o' the floor. They'll hev' tell'd thee likely it wor' Jim; na, na, it wor' masel'."

She looked up with shifty eyes, and Marion wondered at the clannish instinct which even now made her shield her ruffianly grandson.

"I blame myself," she answered, slowly and distinctly, so that the words might penetrate to the benumbed brain, "for not letting Mrs. Dyson come

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before. I left her in charge of Lu while I was away, but I will telegraph for her to-day."

Mrs. Rawson seemed to have forgotten her niece's existence.

"I'll dee nicely now," she said. "Thee'd best be gannin'; if he catches thee here he'll likely mash thee."

"I'm not going until some one comes to be with you. Will you have some more bread?"

"I don't mind."

Familiar with this form of acquiescence, Marion continued feeding her. She resolved to send up Brand's Essence, Liebig's Extract, and other nourishing things so soon as she should be released.

Suddenly the door burst inwards with a kick, and Jim Rawson lurched in, followed by a shivering little whippet greyhound in a neat cloth coat. He took no notice of Marion, but sat heavily down on the chair by the grate, cursing the cold ashes.

Marion stepped quickly across to him. "You've nearly killed your grandmother," she said, in her clear, decisive tones, "and if I can get you put in gaol for it, I shall. You brute, to assault a defenceless old woman!"

He looked at her and he looked again ponderingly. He was drunk enough to be fuddled; but he spoke quite coherently. "What——business is't o' yourn?" he demanded.

"It's the business of every decent man and woman," she answered decisively. "You knocked her down and left her to die."

"Ay, ay, she'll mebbies not try to eat the Pansy's dinner again, I'm thinking," he said.

The whole scene flashed upon Marion in an instant. The dish of scraps set aside for the dog, the trembling old woman groping for something to eat, the ruffian coming in suddenly, and catching her with the dish in her hand, felling her and leaving her to lie there



with callous brutality. Could man be so vile? Marion quivered in a torrent of indignation.

"You unspeakable brute!" she exclaimed, as she returned to the bedside.

He turned in his chair and watched her.

"Gan saftly there, missus," he said. "Ye keep a haud o' yer tongue, and mebbies I'll ho'd mine. Ay, you keep a civil tongue, that's what, keep a civil tongue," he maundered on; then, catching sight of the flask of brandy, he became alert, and made a movement toward it. "What hev' ye gettened there?" he asked. "Hand it over noo."

Marion instantly put it behind her back, and defiantly faced him. He was about the average height of a pitman, and she slightly overtopped him, but she knew that her strength was as a reed in comparison with his muscles, steel-hard with coal-hewing. The fierce fighting instinct rose within her, as it had risen in Mr. Pierson at Brick End, she felt she would die sooner than give up the brandy.

She would hit him, would strike out hard, if he came near her; the spirit which has many times made victory go to the weaker side possessed her, and her blood ran up and down her veins at racing pace. She recked nothing of the unequal odds, of the indignity to her womanhood. For once she was merely a plucky boy, game to the finger-tips, and woe be to the man who laid a finger on her. She even felt a grim satisfaction in the contemplation of smashing her fist into that brutal face; her fist, driven by pent-up indignation at the man's abominable conduct.

He rose and came toward her.

"Ye'd best gie it quietly," he said, and spat on the floor.

Suddenly she raised the flask, and dashed the glass part with all her force on the brick floor; it smashed, and the reek of brandy filled the room, while she laughed shortly.

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Rawson growled like a wild beast with baulked desire, and sprang forward with uplifted arm.

"Touch that lady and I kill you," said a voice behind him.

The man swung aside, dreading attack from the back, and came face to face with Mr. Pierson's secretary. The young man was of fair height but slender. Marion had for the moment some difficulty in recognising him; he was transformed. All his habitual timidity and nervousness had vanished. He seized Jim Rawson by the shoulder, and literally hurled him across the room, before the bully realised what was happening. The man was unsteady on his feet, and, quailing before the unexpected onslaught, he stumbled and fell in a heap. Instantly Mr. Castle stood over him, and banged his head with both fists in so deliberate a manner and with so much apparent enjoyment, that Marion, womanlike, looked on amazed, expecting every minute to see Rawson's skull bashed in. She did not know of what stuff men's heads are made. Rawson, like most bullies, was an abject coward. It was one thing to face a woman for the sake of fiery liquor, quite another to have a fight with a man for no apparent gain. Castle's fists hurt him but little, they rained harmless on his thick skull, but he cursed fearfully, and crawling away made for the door. On reaching it he pulled himself erect by the aid of the lintel, and uttered this fearful threat, "I'll hev the law on yer," before he slunk away.

Mr. Castle then resumed his usual apologetic manner: he apologised extremely for having appeared at all, but it seemed that Mr. Pierson, not satisfied about Tail-Upon-End, had called at the committee rooms on his way through the town, and asked him, as a personal favour, to go there at once, to see what was happening.

Ker, who arrived too late to be of any use, grimly accepted Mr. Castle's apologies, as if he had some right to them. Why did some fellows get all the fun?

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *A LOSING HAZARD.*

"A great soul draws and is drawn with a more fierce intensity than any small one."

O. SCHREINER.

ON Sunday afternoon a considerable party assembled at the mouth of the Duntail colliery. Mr. Pierson had taken this opportunity for inviting his friends to make the descent. He had kept on the ropes that worked the cages during the strike, in order that he might be free to come and go as he chose, in pursuit of further designs, and this, in spite of the fact that there was a ladder exit from the colliery into a field half a mile away, which he could have used had he chosen; in consequence he had been much mocked by Mr. Beresford about the extravagance of a rich man. The party included, not only the Beresfords and Marion Halsted, but Miss Pierson and Mr. Castle, the hero of the adventure on the previous day. This second escapade of Marion's had caused a good deal of amusement, and only Mr. Beresford chose to take a line of his own in the matter, declaring "that rashness was not courage, and fools alone ran their heads into danger with their eyes open."

As they were all standing chatting, waiting for the cage, they were joined by the rival candidate and his wife; Mr. Pierson's invitations had apparently been given liberally.

"I wonder you are not afraid of some deep design, Mr. Pitt," said Marion, laughing. "We might have arranged to entrap you until after the election."

"I considered the possibility, but thought it might be risked," he answered, in her own jesting tone.

The Duntail pit was the smallest of Mr. Pierson's collieries, and was his favourite ; it was suitable for his purposes in many ways, and here he had perfected many of his ideas. It was also a good colliery for sightseers, inasmuch as the coal cut very cleanly without dust, so that there was little risk of getting soiled and dirty. There were three seams, and it was the uppermost, the Low Main, that they were to visit to-day ; this was only about thirty fathoms deep. As it happened, Marion knew it fairly well : her insatiable curiosity as to the details of other lives was not a thing of late growth ; during the time she had lived in her uncle's house she had often visited the pit and persuaded the overman to take her down.

The men had learnt to know her by her largesse in tips, and the overman had treated her partly as a spoiled child and partly as a phenomenal genius. He had allowed her to do whatever she pleased consistently with safety, and even entrusted to her his plans of the colliery and let her follow them out. This man, her special ally, had long ago "shifted," and there had arisen a new overman, who "knew not Joseph." He amused her by his elaborate explanations of the simplest details, and by his extreme caution ; but she soon won him over by the knowledge which she displayed of the workings generally ; a man is always vulnerable on his own subject. She persuaded him to show her how far the coal had been worked out since her day, and what improvements had been made.

"You'd make a good pitman yourself," he told her with admiration, as he led her on, showing her

exclusive wonders that he had effected since he came there.

When at length they rejoined the others, who had scattered in various directions, Marion was full of enthusiasm.

"You are like my wife," said Pitt, "she is never happier than when dabbling in coal. I'm afraid I haven't the correct instinct for it, but then I wasn't bred in a pit country."

Mr. Pierson had not reappeared; the overman volunteered information: "I heard him say he was going along the 'Polka' way with the other two ladies," he said.

"The 'Polka' way?" said Marion gaily. "I don't know that, it is since my time; you must show me, Redman."

Miss Pierson suddenly started up. "Oh, please don't go, Miss Halsted. No, it is not nervousness, it was a presentiment, a kind of shiver came over me as you spoke. I am differently constituted from other people; it is a great misfortune, it makes me so highly nervous. Just as you said the words, 'Polka way,' in connection with my brother's name, a kind of creepy feeling enveloped me."

"I won't go alone," Marion promised, "Redman shall come with me to keep me out of mischief."

As their footsteps died away Miss Pierson seated herself in the overman's cabin with a lugubrious face, and not the whole extent of Pitt's optimism prevailed to comfort her. She was at length relieved to hear her brother's voice, and a minute later he came forward, laughing, followed by the others.

"Come," he said kindly, "what's all this about ghosts and presentiments? We're all right. Miss Halsted knows her way about the pit as well as I do; she found the way herself."

"Not quite," Marion corrected, "but I could next time."

"I hope there never will be a next time," said Miss Pierson. "My nerves are quite upset. I wish I had not been so easily persuaded to come down here against my own judgment."

Monday, being polling day, was full of bustle and excitement. Every vehicle that could be borrowed was engaged in taking voters to the poll, every member of the Beresford household was in a state of quivering expectation, which had infected even the girls, who did their best for the cause by driving the dog-cart and pony-trap incessantly to and fro. Mr. Pierson made a triumphal progress throughout the whole of the constituency on Lord Pitholm's four-in-hand, with Lady Aline on the box beside him. The actual work of the contest was over; it was too late for canvassing or speech-making; the polling day showed a phase of activity peculiar to itself.

The candidate's supporters were too busy to think of regular meals, and thus it was that when Marion came back to the house, worn out, about five o'clock, she found herself quite alone.

She ordered tea in the billiard-room, where there was a fire, and began aimlessly knocking the billiard-balls about until it arrived. In spite of bodily fatigue she was suffering from internal restlessness; her chance was gone, all was over, to-morrow the curtain would be rung down and her path and his once more lie far apart. She was humbled and dismayed to find how blank the future looked.

In a few minutes the footman brought up the tea-tray, and a moment later the door opened to admit Mr. Pierson himself. He came in as if it were the most likely thing in the world that he should be there. "I was coming past," he said, "and yearned for a cup of tea, so I have slipped away for one half-hour. Do you think they will make a hue and cry and run me to earth here?"

She answered jestingly, and sat down by the tea-tray. A look of infinite satisfaction stole over his face as he took the cup from her hand.

"This is good," he said in deepest tones.

She did not speak, to her also it was good to have him there beside her for one half-hour, leaving outside all the beating, throbbing world. She would not think of the cold futility of her life when she should see him no more, this one gleam of light was to lighten and warm all the long black years that stretched ahead in intolerable monotony.

Let us forget that politics exist," he said slowly after a few minutes, "and talk of ourselves. Are you going away to-morrow?"

She signified assent.

"Are you writing another novel at present? I have meant to ask many times."

"No."

"I had hoped it was so. I was reading 'The Jester' again last night—that was the second you wrote. I wondered if there would be as great a gap between three and two as between the second and the first."

Her heart throbbed and glowed. Mr. Pierson was certainly not like other men, his detachment of mind was his peculiar characteristic; one hour an absorbing question of invention or politics might wholly engross him, and the next he would have put it as completely aside as if it had never existed, and be wrapped up in something different. Yet even though she knew him she was astonished to find that he had space in his mind to think of anything but his election on such a day as this; by all the laws of nature he should have been saturated in it. And then a new construction dawned upon her—Ker might be right, for surely no man could think of a woman and her bygone work in the middle of a contest. It proved but one thing, that he must care for her.

The thought made her bold. She saw his face looking at her with an expression of tender interest that eclipsed all the world, and tumultuous feeling leapt until she could hardly restrain herself.

"If ever I write another it will be very different," she said slowly, "for since the last I have entered on a new phase of life—I have known love."

"Ah, I didn't mean—it was wrong of me. I had no intention of forcing a confidence. You believe me, don't you?"

Her hand shook as she refilled his cup, but the old stony hopelessness was creeping back. He would never understand.

He stood before her gently courteous.

"Forgive me, Miss Halsted, I never imagined anything of that kind; it was not that I had the remotest idea you were in any trouble. I asked it in regard to the books simply."

She had never heard him genuinely asking pardon of any one before, and it touched her; and yet she knew that they were further apart than they had been two minutes before. She was very quiet now, and there was something almost pathetic in her white face as she glanced up at him. The next words would make or mar all.

"There is nothing to forgive," she said, in a very low voice. "The question touched me deeply, because I am feeling very strongly, and I—didn't wish to betray myself." She rose and moved a billiard-cue that was leaning against the wall into the safe harbourage of a corner. Her usual brightness was veiled in a kind of timid tenderness.

"This is worse and worse," he said desperately. "I say again a thousand times forgive me for having blundered unintentionally into a painful secret; but, even though you give me to understand it yourself, I can hardly believe it, *you* could not love unreturned. But—I need not say—your secret is safe with me,



Miss Halsted, I would not have hurt you for the world."

An awful deadness seized her ; it was all over, and she was bound in the toils of an inherited womanhood, dumb to save herself ; she might face a drunken pitman, and drive a hansom cab through the streets of London at midnight, but she could not tell a man to his face that she loved him, though she believed that he did care for her, and that this misunderstanding was perfectly sincere on his part.

She looked at him dumbly as he went on blunderingly.

"Forgive me, forgive my impertinence——"

For an instant his hand touched hers as it rested on the mantelpiece, their faces were hardly six inches apart. If she could only have peered for a moment deep down into his heart to read there any real love or tenderness for herself individually ! But she could not, they were as effectually divided as if they had spoken different and far alien tongues. Yet once again she made a terrible effort.

"It's not that, you don't understand—only——"

"Only that I have probed feelings you have bravely concealed from all the world, and pierced wounds that might have healed. O God—to think that I have caused you pain !"

They stood there, stirred as they had neither of them ever been before, in every fibre, by a terrible emotion, each deeply concentrated on the other, yet helpless to explain, and profoundly ignorant of the feelings that were so agitating the other.

Could thought but have touched thought, as we believe it will hereafter, in a moment a world of revelation would have flashed clear before them. She would have seen if this barrier which stood between her and Paradise were a real one, or whether it were of glass to be broken with the lightest word ; yet as it was she might not put out her hand to

test it. Strange contrast, the deepest emotion that the strong soul of a woman can feel, bound by the ribbon of a "general-utility" convention!

There are many women incapable of intense feeling of any sort, and it is not they who know, but others, those whose souls have depths not lightly stirred, who may have felt once in a lifetime the exaltation or detachment which comes in moments of supreme agony whether it be mental or physical, an agony which makes a strong man rave in delirium. Suffering seems to have the effect of loosening the cords of control. The members and organs are impotent, and at the mercy of that which has seized the seat of sensation. It seemed impossible that a woman could be so possessed by one thought that utterance could burst out in spite of herself, or rather without conscious volition, yet as she gazed in hopeless agony across the space that separated her from him, Marion heard her own tongue utter with low intensity:

"I love *you*!"

For the moment she did not realise that she herself had spoken aloud, then with an exceeding bitter cry she covered her face with her hands and fled from the room.

The door opened again almost as it closed behind her, and Mr. Beresford and a Cabinet Minister, who was in the county to assist the Conservative candidate, entered together.

A wild warm wind howled in the shrubbery, and tossed the boughs of the beeches in wild confusion against a dim sky.

Marion was sitting crouched up on the stump of a long dead tree. A rough tweed cape had slipped from her shoulders, and her head was supported by her arms, her rounded chin resting in the strong white hands as in a cup.

What did it all mean? What was the interpreta-

tion of it? Against her own volition she had flung all on one die and lost; he did not love her. She had sacrificed all the traditions of her life and merited her own eternal scorn, to win the contempt of the man whose opinion she valued above all the world. For hour after hour she had been there, not thinking connectedly, but in a chaos of pain. No one would miss her. Her aunt and cousins were all to dine and sleep in the town to hear the result of the poll. She might sit so all night if she listed, and at first it had seemed as if that were likely. She was paralysed, and had lost the power to move or think. She sat motionless, and by degrees various disconnected phrases began to float through her mind. Had she really said that in the end? It had seemed impossible a moment before.

And he, what of him? She had not looked at him as she fled, but surely some movement, some gesture, would have detained her had the avowal meant as much to him as it did to her. Then an awful thought shaped itself and rose like a grisly demon filling her mind, and driving out all else. She seemed to see Mr. Pierson's face, not kindly and genial, but transformed, grinning in triumph, malevolent. Was it thus he had looked as her wild words broke upon his ear? Was there not another hideous possibility? She'drove the thought back, fighting with it, but it came again, until it gained its ground and held her captive.

What of all those stories, of that strong fascination which he exercised over women?

There was no smoke without fire!

Was it not possible that he was a deliberate woman killer? That he worked to win the hearts of the opposite sex? That he drew them on with diabolical ingenuity, by sympathy or deliberate misunderstanding, until he had forced from their tortured hearts avowals such as hers, over which he could gloat? A regular lady killer! She had heard that

expression applied to him. Two or three months ago such a thought would not even have occurred to her ; but since then her knowledge of Archie's hidden life had shaken the foundations of her faith in all men.

True, this supposition involved an almost incredible duplicity : the man must be the very devil incarnate, but was he not amazingly clever ? After apathy came wringing torture, a very gimlet of pain which twisted and turned until Marion started to her feet, unable to remain still. A month or two earlier she would have fled off on her bicycle throughout the country, to relieve by physical action her pain ; now, though she sprang to her feet, she walked soberly enough to the house : the impulses of girlhood had gone never to return.

There was no one in the empty house, and the manservant, surprised at seeing her, asked if she would have dinner. She assented dully, and pretended to eat what was placed before her. It was after nine o'clock. Then she sat down on a lounge chair by the doorstep, and waited. For what ?

In the badly paved market-place of the county town the shop-keepers had put up their shutters rather earlier than usual, though the crowds of people gathered in from the district were singularly quiet and well behaved. When the last sealed ballot-box had been brought in, and the counting had begun in one of the committee-rooms attached to the Town Hall, Pitt and Garthwaite had been present ; beside them there were only the clerical staff and the agents. As the limits of space were restricted, it had been deemed advisable to strictly regulate admittances.

Mr. Pierson arrived later, accompanied by his ministerial ally and Mr. Beresford, who waited with the others in an adjacent lobby. The room was hot. The great clock on the outer wall had a dial, facing both outwards and inwards ; it ticked on with

a terrible monotony, the jerk of the immense minute hand being each time clearly visible. The great glass windows below opened on to a balcony, and through them could be heard the impatient murmurs of the throng without, which swelled every now and then into shouts in which the names of the rival candidates were about equally mingled. The people grew more noisy and restless as the result was long in coming. Within, it had been known with tolerable accuracy, long before the official notification. There was no mistaking the overwhelming preponderance of votes for one candidate. As the great clock struck twelve there was a momentary hush in the uproar, as if those waiting expected the result to be immediately made known, but when no sign appeared from the room the yells and hoots broke out into a storm.

A moment later there was a great crush, a reeling forward as the window of the room was flung up and the sheriff stepped forth with the three candidates.

He read the figures, which were also projected from within by limelight on a white sheet prepared for the purpose :

Garthwaite . . . . .	10,735
Pierson . . . . .	3814
Pitt . . . . .	2553

A deafening roar, a howling torrent of sound, succeeded ; the pitmen had voted to a man for their candidate, in spite of their dissatisfaction and their proud boast of independence ; they had fallen into line like schoolboys, when the day came, and had recorded their opinions in favour of the official nominee ; and as one of the minority phrased it with a fine contempt for mixed metaphor, had " been led by the nose like sheep by blind guides."

Garthwaite now represented in Parliament the aspirations and opinions of a large section of North Miningshire.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *A BOY'S LOVE.*

"O hard, most hard ! But while my fretted heart  
Shut out, shut down, and full of pain,  
Sobbed to itself apart,  
Ached to itself in vain,  
One came who loveth me  
As I love thee."

J. INGLOW.

THE London season began in a burst of sunshine. As if at the word of a conjurer, the streets were thronged with people displaying their superfluous wealth. The society columns of the papers once more recorded in a high note of untuned and little varied eulogy that "Lady Blankshire looked pretty in cabbage-green, with tea roses in her toque ; Miss Worldsend quite a picture with her Venetian red hair ; Lady Not-as-nice extremely well, and that she had with her two charming daughters in orange-heliotrope cloth, with glimpses of pale blue ; Mrs. Apt was picturesque as usual, and her sister looked lovely in nasturtium-puce ; little Miss Gregory grows prettier every year, and her cherry-coloured ribbons waved becomingly in the air."

From Monte Carlo, Cannes, Nice, St. Moritz, Cairo, or the Riviera, people began to swarm back to the streets of London, where the air was clear and fresh, the green of the trees yet undefiled. Though the real crush had not begun, there was plenty to do. A charitable sale of work to attend, a private concert,

a reception, a new play in which the daughter of a noble house was to take a leading part; coming marriages were announced, the stir and bustle of big events made themselves felt. The Sunday evening supper-tables at the Savoy were filled again with the people to whom dining is an artistic pleasure, and the rooms were lit up by gleams of satin veiled in lace or tulle, the glitter of spangles, the sparkle of diamonds. Prince's skating club was full once more, and it was here that Marion made her first public appearance, a fact instantly commented on in all the journals, where she was unanimously told that she was looking lovely, a compliment that lost its value when simultaneously presented to at least a dozen other women, who varied in appearance from the passable to the extremely plain. At any rate, it was easier to live in London when one's heart was dead; there was friction in the air to galvanise one into a semblance of life, even journalistic compliments were of the nature of salve to a wounded pride, and it was nice to be "some one" again. And Marion did not depend wholly on journalistic compliments either, her circle of friends flocked around her, with the *ennui* of last season washed away by a course of Continental travel. It is an excellent institution, this London season; one has hardly time to be wearied of one's friends before one has seen the last of them for nearly a year.

About the middle of April the Prince returned to town, and the season began in earnest. The chronicler of street inanities was busier than ever. Mrs. Sampson Cunningham had been seen driving in a high victoria with her little son. The Duchess of Lackland had appeared in Sloane Street with half a dozen of the toy terriers she so much affected, which she seemed to have some difficulty in managing. Miss Hannen was still in mourning for her brother. The Miss Margerites appeared "almost prettier than

ever," and always dressed alike. Lady Nincompoop still delicate, but looking stronger than last year, and so on, and so on,—stuff which formed the only literary nutriment of scores of women.

In the beginning of May, Marion attended a reception given by the Duchess of Rington at the Grafton Galleries. It was a very fashionable affair, and titles jostled one another on the stairs. The Duchess, in "malmaison pink with ropes of pearls," received her guests with that graciousness which, born of convention and custom, was of such long habit that it had become almost genuine, and was at all events indistinguishable from the real article.

On these occasions Marion missed Philip, he had frequently been among the unattached men present, and had constituted himself her guardian. Many persons chattered to her and passed on, but the exceeding loneliness of it all had never struck her so forcibly as it did to-night. Presently little Mrs. Dannie, a woman who possessed none of the attributes for a successful and happy society life, was borne up against her by the crowd, and her worn face smote Marion with a kind of pitiful pain. The eyes were fever-bright, the cheeks carefully tinted, but no art could hide their worn hollows, or the terrible mirthlessness of the smile.

"There you are," she said by way of greeting. "Just got back? No? Where have you been? Only the north? Dear me, how dismal! In search of copy, I suppose? Now what do you think of this catastrophe off the Isle of Man, and how will it affect Stanley Thirsk? No one seems to know, and I was sure you would be up in all the details."

"I really don't know to what you are referring, Mrs. Dannie," said Marion. "What has happened?"

"Why, didn't you see it in all the papers to-day? Oh, I am glad, I always like to be the first to tell news. This is very sad, of course! The three



grandsons of the Duke of Borrowdale were drowned in a yachting accident off the coast of the Isle of Man, and they say the Duke will never hold up his head again ; he's had one stroke already, you know."

"I didn't look at to-day's papers, for a wonder! Yes, Stanley will be heir-presumptive, and eventually Duke of Borrowdale. What an extraordinary change in his prospects!"

The news interested Marion extremely ; she thought of the good-humoured, unaffected boy, in chronic want of money, surely the very strangest sort of duke ever pitched upon by an irresponsible fate! Stanley entitled to a coronet, Stanley with the strawberry-leaves, Stanley an hereditary legislator! What absurdity! What effect would this sudden change in his prospects have upon him? Was his character already too much "set" to be altered, or would he grow into a very different man from what he would have been had fate left him to himself?

She looked up the papers directly she returned home, and discovered that he was on a cycling tour in Brittany, and no one seemed to know his exact whereabouts, so that he had not yet been communicated with.

It was four or five days before two of the bodies were recovered, and simultaneously the papers announced the death of the old Duke, who had died without recovering consciousness, and that the new Duke was on his way to England, as fast as steam could bring him. What a sudden responsibility, what an abrupt transition! Every one in the country was to-day talking of the boy, thus, by an unprecedentedly tragic event, thrust into such a high position.

Marion had an invitation to a box at the opera that night. She went, but could think all the time of nothing but Stanley ; for the moment her own trouble was submerged in the interest of his new life. The situation appealed to her novelist's imagination, she

began to search among her girl friends to discover one who would be a good wife for him ; he must be guarded against the wiles of half a hundred match-making mothers.

The next few days were filled up by the usual events, drawing-room teas, at homes, calls, shopping, the necessity for interviewing the dressmaker, "small" dances, all the more sought after because of their limits. Some friends had offered Marion a seat on their four-in-hand for a meet in Hyde Park, and she had accepted it ; but wished she had declined when Lord Pitholm's four-in-hand drove up alongside with Lady Aline on the box beside her brother. All the feelings which Marion had been trying to smother and bury burst up, reawakened at the reminiscences evoked by the sight, and the old miserable restlessness once more had her in its grip. Oddly enough she heard of Mr. Pierson twice again in the same day. Mrs. Cameron, at whose house she had first met him, mentioned that the boys' homes were a great success, and invited her to come to see them, adding that there had been a tea and parade a day or two before, at which Mr. Pierson himself had been present, and some one else added that she had seen him at Newmarket. Marion realised that, try as she might to avoid him, she was bound to meet him sooner or later, and the thought overwhelmed her.

During the following week the glory of May, heretofore so brilliant, was dimmed by a bitter east wind. Marion had been one afternoon to a charitable bazaar in the Albert Hall, opened by Royalty in person, and had come away in a hansom ; as she reached her own door she saw another hansom there, and recognised Stanley standing on her doorstep.

When he saw her in his turn his face beamed.

"Now this is luck !" he cried. "I have only this one afternoon in town, and I hardly dared hope to find you. You can't say you are out."

"I have no intention of doing so, your Grace," said Marion jestingly. "I have to congratulate you, and at the same time condole with you."

"I'm awfully cut up over it," he said, as he followed her upstairs. "Everard was older than me, and Alfred just my age; Hugh was only a little chap, about thirteen. Of course I feel it's all humbug and they're still alive, and I jolly well wish they were; but I didn't come to talk about that, it's something quite different, something awfully hard to say. You won't laugh at me, Marion?"

A tremor of feeling in his voice warned her, and as she sat down on the sofa she hastily tried to avert the disclosure, to warn him off, even at the eleventh hour.

"Some scrape you've got into, you bad boy?" she cried. "No, of course I won't laugh. I've known you so long, and am like an elder sister; you are quite right to come to tell me."

He crossed over to where she was, and sat down beside her.

"Oh, don't, for God's sake, Marion, don't talk like that! I'm not a child, and Heaven knows how I love you."

"Stanley, don't!" she said in a kind of choked voice. "It was wrong, very wrong of me to have you here so much, and talk to you so; but until the last time I never dreamed you could care for me at all in that way."

"But it's not so absurd," he cried. "I'm in my twenty-third year, and you're only about six-and-twenty. What's that? Besides, I'm taller than you. Marion, I'm ill with loving you. I can't bear it any more. While you were away I used to wander round here at nights like a ghost, until the policeman grew suspicious, and once when I was sick with longing to see your dear face I just kissed the doorstep because you had so often trodden on it."

"Stanley, hush! it's no good. I am ten years older than you. I shall be thirty-two soon, and you know that, because I told you before; besides, it isn't years that make all the difference, it's people themselves. If I were a little baby-faced woman it wouldn't seem so preposterous; but quite apart from that, I don't care for you in that way, not in the least like that, and never shall."

She inadvertently made a gesture with her hand, and he caught it and covered it with hot passionate kisses. There was something so pathetic, so touching in the devotion of a fresh unspoiled boy, in the first genuine passion of his life, that she had to keep tight control on herself not to betray emotion which might have been misconstrued into encouragement. As she rescued her hand he broke out again.

"When I knew you were coming back, I forced myself to go away for a holiday, because I knew I had nothing to offer. I couldn't tell you, and seeing you only made it worse; and then this came, and through all the world there rang only one word—'Marion!' I know, of course, riches and being a duchess and all that don't make any difference to you, but it made all the difference to me, because I could speak, I could tell you what I felt! I was cut up about the boys and the old governor; but yet all the time I felt just 'Marion!' and oh, if you will only give me a little hope, I will wait years and worship you. I would do anything in the world you wanted, and though I'm not much of a fellow, not clever and that, yet a clever woman does not want a clever husband, and it's something to have some one who worships the very ground you tread upon."

"Dear Stanley, don't go on, I blame myself so bitterly. Can't you see how impossible it is?"

"No I can't, and never shall."

She saw that the impulse of the boy had hardened

into the decision of the man ; this was far more difficult to deal with.

" I don't care, I shall go on always caring, and in time I'll win you—yes, I mean to. You shall love me ! It's the man's part to win, and I can't expect to do it all at once. I shall love you always and do everything in the world I can, and in time perhaps you'll begin to care for me a little too."

" Never, Stanley ! " She spoke sharply.

He shook his head with an obstinacy she had not hitherto encountered in him.

" I can't give it up. I can't believe you will never care for me, it's too blasphemously cruel. Marion, if you marry any one else, I'll shoot him first and then myself."

" Stanley, for Heaven's sake don't talk so foolishly. You're not acting in a way to make me respect you. Believe me, there is no chance, now nor at any time, and if you feel so badly about it, I shall have to forbid you to come here or see me at all. There is no hope."

" I don't believe it." He looked at her, but a settled despair on his young face belied his words. A dreadful thought crept into his eyes and he spoke it instantly.

" Unless you care for some one else ? "

It was kinder that he should know, and Marion made the effort.

" I do," she said.

With a low cry of intense pain he buried his face in his arms, and remained motionless. Marion herself suffered during the next few moments, but she little knew the earthquake which had upriven his whole being. This view had never occurred to him. He had always known Marion gay and untouched, admired but quite heartwhole. He knew all her friends, and had never seen a breath of tenderness on her side toward one of them. Besides, the egotism of youth had perhaps presented the question to

him so strongly from his own side that he had not considered it from hers. He had thought that she did not care for him, but so long as she cared for no one else he might win her. Love would come. He had had but little experience, and imagined that love such as his could not be unrequited; with this revelation of an unscalable barrier he was overwhelmed. Marion allowed him to remain silent for a long time, and then she got up and left him.

When she returned in a quarter of an hour he was still in the same attitude, and it was necessary to arouse him; she dared not speak kindly.

"Stanley," she said suddenly, "do you think only of yourself? You profess to love me; have you no wish that I should be happy?"

He drew a long breath.

"I love another as you love me, but you give me no sympathy, you have no desire that my heart's wish should be gratified."

He stood up quickly, his back was to the light, so that she could not well see his face; but his voice was dry and husky. He held out his hand.

"God help you, Marion, and make you happy," he said, and walked quietly and sedately from the room. More changes than the mere gaining of a title had come upon him in the last week, he had changed from a boy into a man.

Marion was still seated in the same chair, when the servant brought in a foreign letter which had just come. It was from Philip, and at first she let it lie unopened, but after half an hour she roused herself, and glanced through it. Then she read it again with more attention, to strengthen her first conclusion.

"Poor Gwen!" she said softly.

Philip wrote from the Cape, where he had been for some weeks. He was apparently in good health and spirits, the climate was pleasant, the men he had to deal with were good fellows in the main; he did not

mention Gwen for the first page, and then wrote : " I see you were quite right, Miriam, this is not the sort of life for a girl. I was so much in love that I could not help saying so, but it certainly is unfair to bind a woman to me for years with no prospect of marriage, or, at the best, to ask her to come out to this sort of thing ; it isn't so bad for a man, but a woman—no. Of course I blame myself bitterly for my want of self-control, I ought never to have spoken ; you can say what you like of me, you can't say worse than I think of myself. I have not written to Gwen yet about this, but it will have to be done ! "

Then followed a detailed account of the work, and at the extreme end, " I met some people on board as I came here, the Savilles, and they were very nice ; I may see them again. He is a sterling good chap, and she must be his second wife, I think ; she is a pretty little woman, too young to be the mother of Miss Saville."

That was all ! Poor Gwen !

## CHAPTER XXV.

### *BACK IN LONDON.*

"It is not a vain thing for you because it is your life."

MOSES.

ON the following Sunday Marion went up to Possibility Hall to see Miss Denver; she had not been ten minutes in that astute lady's presence before she had unconsciously betrayed herself. Though Miss Denver was not sentimental herself, she was lenient to sentiment in other people, and she was rather pleased than otherwise to find the hitherto untouched Marion a victim to the disease in its worst form. Her gentleness and quietness, the hopeless look in her eyes, had all so far changed her from the wild, radiant girl she had been a few months ago, that a duller person than Miss Denver might have seen the difference without attributing it to the right cause. Miss Denver not only scented out the right cause, but knew the right man. "Humph! why can't he take the goods the gods give him?" she grumbled to herself, for in her own robust way she had no small opinion of her niece.

On leaving Possibility Hall, where she had lunched, Marion took an omnibus up Oxford Street, intending to call in Gloucester Square to see some friends. When she got out at the Marble Arch her attention was attracted by a hansom cab drawn up in the middle of the road, while two men vainly endeavoured to thrust the wheels round to force forward a jibbing



horse. The driver, who had not left his dickey, was young Curtis. Marion saw that at a glance, and a memory of the night of her cab work came over her. How much had happened since then! It seemed a decade ago!

The fare inside the cab, a placid, white-haired man, had not left his place; but when at length all coaxing had failed, the boy-driver requested him to get out in view of the coming contest between himself and his horse, and the other men stood clear. The animal in the shafts was a chestnut mare with rather a raw outline but with signs of breeding about her. Curtis had been trying to go westward down the Bayswater Road, but when he made up his mind for the inevitable tussle, he pulled her round eastward, in which direction she went willingly enough. It was evidently only in that particular spot opposite the Marble Arch that the angel in the pathway lay. The cab rattled away as far as the junction with Orchard Street, and there swung round and came back at a quick trot, watched with interest by the small crowd which had instantly collected. As it was Sunday the street was comparatively clear, and the game could be seen uninterruptedly. The boy's eyes were bright, and his lips tightly shut, as he came smartly on; he braced himself for the expected jerk at the objectionable spot, and it came with a decision that might otherwise have thrown him on to the roof of the vehicle. A few minutes more were passed in renewed coaxing, but without result. The mare began to show temper. Then the driver turned her round and round, using the cab as a pivot. The people who were watching applauded, but the boy took no notice, he continued drawing the unwilling animal backwards with great dexterity, pulling this rein and that, to keep off the kerb, manoeuvring round and round with a skill that showed he could have driven backwards as easily as forwards had he chosen; when he had succeeded in

thoroughly bewildering his horse he stopped suddenly, and sat looking down with an amused and impartial smile upon the upturned faces. Suddenly, without any preliminary warning, he gathered up the reins, and with a flick of his whip wheeled the mare westward and the thing was done. He made her trot slowly only so far as the first island, and turning brought her back at a walking pace right over the hated spot. He let her go eastward for about fifty yards, and many of the bystanders melted away thinking that the fun was over, but others waited, amused by the lad's cool self-assurance. He turned again, and came toward the Marble Arch once more, gathering speed as he came, quicker and quicker until the animal rattled by ; when he was away well down the Bayswater Road, quite clear of the place, he took his whip and laid into his mare with all the force of his strong young arm. Marion saw the whip flashing backwards and forwards while the mare galloped as fast as she could lay her hoofs to the ground. Far away down the long slope the cab danced and swayed until it was out of sight.

A quarter of an hour later Marion returned to the Marble Arch, having found that her friends were out, and there before her was the identical cab standing on the disputed spot with the driver examining a sweating beast and talking to it with reproachful familiarity.

On the impulse of the moment she hailed him.

"Where do you want to go, lady?" he asked, having obeyed the summons.

"Lexham Gardens. Is your horse too tired?"

"No, that'll just cool her down nicely."

He took her across the Gardens by the powder magazine, and when he pulled up at the number she had given she handed him half a sovereign.

"I like pluck," she said, "and there's not too much of it in the world."

He knew that she had witnessed the fight.

"It doesn't do to let her have all her own way," he said, "but barring a bit of self-will she's as good a mare as ever stepped. I'm very much obliged to you, lady."

"Do you care to come on order?" she asked. "I use a hansom a good deal and would send for you."

He found a soiled card. "That'll always find me," he said, "if I get the order first post before I leave the yard."

"You're on day work now?"

The "now" slipped out unintentionally.

He assented, smiling; he did not seem to have observed the slip.

Oddly enough she was destined to see more of him very shortly.

One day there was a wedding in St. Peter's, Eaton Square, and though the bridegroom was only a plain "Mr.," those who "knew" explained that the wedding was quite as grand as a more distinguished one, for the blood of three dukes ran in the veins of the happy couple.

The church was beautifully decorated, the service choral, and the congregation was more decorous than is usual on occasions of this kind.

At the most solemn moment Marion realised that she was within a few feet of the man who had changed the whole current of her life. She had not seen him before, for he was a few pews in front of her, and had been hidden by intervening backs. A desire to fly was not to be indulged. Was it likely that amid all that galaxy of glory he would notice and pick her out?

She could not well avoid going to the reception in Belgrave Square afterwards, as the bride's people were more than mere acquaintances, and no casual excuse for non-attendance would have satisfied them; besides, it was hardly likely Mr. Pierson would find

his way there. Hardly likely, but it happened nevertheless, for as she stood, delicately eating an ice, he was beside her, and in a perfectly unchanged and unaffected voice greeted her by name. If any one had foretold that in five minutes they would be talking together without embarrassment she would not have believed it, yet so it was. Mr. Pierson made no scruple of alluding to North Miningshire and the political contest there, and discussed his pits with the undercurrent of amused comment that had always attracted her. Yet as she grew bolder, and looked at him, she was astonished at the change in him, the outline of his face had altered, his cheeks were heavy, his eyes hollow, there was a new line on his forehead (how well she knew the others!) and his hair was distinctly greyer.

The full confidence in him which always grew in his presence gradually came over her, and the breath of scandal and the attribution of evil motive seemed far away and melting into thin air. After all, if she had been destined from the beginning to make that terrible false step, it was well she had chosen for her confidante a man so capable, so true and strong.

The subjects which they discussed were all ordinary enough, yet Marion remembered every single word afterwards. He told her that the strike was as virulent and determined as ever, and that he was going to Germany shortly in connection with some business matters. She was glad at last that she had the courage to break away without delaying unduly, glad even of that small modicum of resolution, so entirely was she influenced by this man's presence. He came down into the hall with her, and there they found Clemence waiting with a note.

"This came from St. George's Hospital, mum," she explained, "and the man said that it was urgent, so knowing you were so near I brought it on."

"Quite right," said Marion. Then "Oh!"

She turned naturally in her perplexity to the man from whom she had suffered the bitterest humiliation. "It is a young cabman," she began incoherently. "He has had a bad accident, and is at the hospital. He asks for me incessantly."

"Poor fellow! Well, he is in good hands."

"Yes. His name is Curtis."

"Curtis? That's odd. I know of a young cabman named Curtis, the son of a butler of mine; a wild young scamp by all accounts."

"What an extraordinary coincidence! It can't be the same."

"It may be. The man who was my butler left my service a year or two ago and set up in business for himself. I will find out about it."

He summoned a hansom for her, and she drove to the hospital with Clemence.

Young Curtis lay in the accident ward with a screen round his bed; he was strapped and bandaged all over, but his head was free and he rolled it incessantly from side to side. When he saw Marion he laughed, as one laughs in delirium; yet he recognised her, and began a strange jargon in which, "my mare Daisy," "hansom cabs," and "Lord Adolphus" were about equally mingled. That he identified her in some way with the night of cab-driving was evident, but whether it was by the vague instinct of half-be-numbed brain or by a clearly reasoned sequence she could not guess. That he wanted her to promise something in regard to "my mare Daisy" was equally clear, and she promised anything and everything to quiet him. She was only allowed to stay with him for a minute or so, and she heard the details of the accident from the sister in charge. It seemed to have been an ordinary cab smash, in which the mare had lost her temper and dashed into a lamp-post, pitching her driver under the wheels of a passing omnibus. An operation was necessary, but with

youth and strength on his side it was thought that the boy would pull through.

More than a week elapsed before Marion saw him again, though she called every day to ask after his welfare and to leave fruit for him. When she was at last admitted, she found that he had already a visitor. The grave neat man who rose respectfully at her entrance could be none other than Curtis the butler, his calling was written in his manner, and no further confirmation of Mr. Pierson's conjecture was needed. Marion had a little talk with him first.

"I haven't seen the boy for years," he said. "I was left a widower with him at a very early age, and I put him out to nurse; and ever since he's gone his way and I've gone mine. I've often thought, miss, as it might be a judgment of Providence for the neglect of parental duties."

Young Curtis was very quiet to-day and very weak. He smiled as Marion approached, but did not speak. The operation had been performed successfully.

Marion sat down beside him. "I'm glad your father has come to see you," she said.

"We're good friends enough," he answered feebly. "We've never interfered with one another."

Then something of the old brightness came into his eyes. "I understand I was talking a lot of nonsense to you the other day, miss, I wasn't rightly in my head. Of course the mare'll have to go."

"Not if I can help it. One reason why I came to-day was to hear what it was you wanted me to do."

"If they'd only keep her till I was about again. You see, miss, it isn't every man that understands her, and now she's had this kick-up they'll think she's vicious, and get rid of her. She wasn't hurt at all, they tell me, she only pitched me off; and, bless you, she didn't mean it. It was enough to set any horse out of his skin—one of them bumbling blasted motor cars came right into the middle of us, so to speak."

"If it can be managed, I'll do it; the cab-master won't have sold her already, will he?"

"Not likely. Will you see her? You know a good horse by sight, and you can feel for chaps like us. Yes, it's no good deceiving you. I know it was you. No, I'm not wandering. I mean it was you as took out Lord Adolphus' cab that night. Lord! how often I have thought of it, and the way you bolted down Beauchamp Place, and the bobby—it was fine—begging your pardon, miss."

He spoke weakly and with evident effort, but the spirit was strong within him.

She smiled. "You kept my secret well; I owe you something for that. But tell me, how did you find it out?"

"Mostly little things. Us fellows who live in the streets learn to put two and two together. Now there was your voice for one thing. I thought you was a young gent at first, but when you sings out to me 'Look out!' in the Brompton Road, why, I knew then as plain as could be you was a lady. Well, after that I see you one day walking in Piccadilly with Lord Adolphus, and I spotted you pretty well, and when you hailed me last Sunday, I knew you again directly. Oh yes, it don't take much to let me into the bottom of things. But there, I'll swear this to you, miss, I've never let it off my tongue to any living man, no, nor woman neither."

"I feel quite safe, but I'm wrong to let you talk so much; you're getting quite exhausted. How long do you think you'll be here?"

"A long job. I heard 'em say maybe four or five weeks, and all that blessed time the mare——"

"Set your mind quite at rest about the mare. I'm going straight from here to see the master at the yard."

He smiled, and muttered half-shamefacedly: "Ef you do see the mare yourself you might just

tell her I don't bear her no ill-will. She'll understand, bless you, she knows all you say just like a Christian."

Marion intended to buy the mare outright, and give her to the boy when he came out of the hospital. She did not feel that she could invest in a cab also, as that would be rather beyond her means, but there would be no difficulty in his hiring a cab until he had himself saved enough to pay for it. When she reached the stables she found the matter had been already settled without reference to her. "A gentleman" had bought the horse a few days previously in young Curtis's interest, and although no name transpired it was not difficult to surmise the identity of this unknown benefactor. The foreman of the yard seemed much impressed by his young cabman's powerful friends, and reiterated with emphasis to his cronies afterwards, "Blowed ef one toff or another didn't come ev'ry day the fellow was in 'orspital offerin' to buy the mare for him outright; he might ha' bin related to the Prince o' Wyles!"

Accidents are said never to come singly, and it is certainly strange to find how often after hearing of one catastrophe which affects us personally we find it to be only the herald of a group, which precedes another calm period.

The accident which had made Stanley Duke of Borrowdale had been followed by that affecting a much humbler member of society, young "Peter," and it was not long before Marion, who had been concerned in both, received news of a third, which, in its sequence, touched her no less nearly.

A letter sent by hand from Miss Denver was an uncommon occurrence, and on receiving such a missive Marion opened it with misgiving. Miss Denver wrote from her brother's house in Bloomsbury to announce his sudden death. Uncle Paul had been trying a new set of conjuring tricks, and had choked



himself with a marble, an ignominious and awful death for a man who had attained his seventieth year. The mingling of childish catastrophe and awful consequence made the event peculiarly gruesome, and for the next few days the shadow of it obscured other thoughts. Marion came and went, helping her aunt to make the necessary arrangements for the funeral, summoning relatives, and winding up affairs. It was a surprise to every one to find that Philip had been left sole residuary legatee, and that he was consequently a man of property.

"He laughed very heartily at your uncle's tricks the last time he saw him," said Aunt Augusta, when she heard the will. "That may have had something to do with it. I see the date is immediately after Philip came up to say good-bye. He laughed uproariously—struck me he'd been dining too well; but I daresay he needed something to string him up for all the partings, and I will say Philip has never given any anxiety in that direction. Perhaps the responsibility of wealth will steady him. I shall have to get many a subscription out of him." The idea of this reversal of position amused her, and she chuckled grimly. Yet she was by no means devoid of grief at her loss; if Paul had been odd and peculiar, she had seen him much, and her sisterly affection for him had been genuine.

Marion remembered Philip's last letter, and thought of the irony of the situation. Why did everything come when it was too late to be of any use? She fancied she knew him well enough to be sure that he would come straight home to marry Gwen, without giving her any hint of the gradual cooling of his affections. He would hardly have been a Denver could he have acted otherwise, and after all perhaps it was the best thing that could have happened. Gwen was sterling, her nature the antithesis of his, in married life they might get on very well.

Marion's confidence was justified. The news cabled

to Philip brought a cabled reply to Gwen, the one word "Coming."

Paul Denver's death, of course, released Marion from all further society engagements for the season. She hardly knew if she were glad or sorry; empty as the meeting with her fellow-beings seemed to her now, it yet filled up the gap and killed gnawing thought.

She stayed on in town for a week or two after the funeral, and then resolved to go across the Channel for a month, taking Lu and Clemence with her, to some quiet and little known French town.

Her writing power had returned to her, and in the planning of a third novel she could find distraction and occupation. She felt sorry to leave Curtis, who looked forward to her visits as the great treat of the week, but she made arrangements whereby his material comforts would not be lessened by her absence, and she asked Miss Denver as a great favour to take her place and visit him sometimes, and try to get some hold or influence over him which might be an incentive to him to keep straight when he should be once more able to resume his cab work.

Then good-bye to England,—a brief crossing, succeeded by dear little picturesque Caudebec with its quaint houses, its marvellous cathedral, its broad flowing Seine with peaceful shores, the blue-bloused workmen, the nut-brown women, the merry little French children, for a whole month.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### *MISS DENVER USURPS THE PLACE OF PROVIDENCE.*

"It is in aims which put sympathy out of question that the angel is shown."

EMERSON.

MISS DENVER had always believed in Mr. Pierson's absolute integrity. She belonged to the robust type, which needs no proof of its own generalisations; yet she understood that all people were not of her disposition, and she was confident that her niece had found an obstacle to happiness in the scandalous stories afloat about him. She had thought of the matter several times in her own large-hearted way, and when she went to see young Curtis in the hospital, in accordance with her promise to Marion, and discovered that his father had been for many years in Mr. Pierson's service, she began to investigate with a worthy object.

An outspoken bluntness is often correlated with an absence of sensitiveness. Miss Denver had no qualms as to the propriety of "pumping" Curtis senior on the facts of his former master's history. The man at first showed some reticence, but Miss Denver was not easily turned aside from any purpose. She went to see him at his own shop, managed to make him understand that she was entirely in his master's interest, and she had her reward in unearthing a story so amazing, so preposterous, that it recurred to

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her mind even in the middle of an entertainment at Possibility Hall.

It was the true history of the divorce case in which Mr. Pierson had figured as co-respondent, and which had subsequently overshadowed his career, cropping up at intervals. Told without irrelevancy the facts were these.

Lady Briar, the unhappy wife of Lord Briar, had endured her married life of misery for seven years, before meeting with Mr. Pierson. Her lord and master was as despicable a scamp as it is possible to conceive. Every humiliation and degradation that can be inflicted on a woman were her portion. He was openly licentious, yet he never overstepped the bounds by personal cruelty. By the hideous laws of her country she was bound to a man whose name was a by-word among men of honour, yet she had no redress. Then one awful night she had placed her future in Mr. Pierson's hands, demanding from him a sacrifice of reputation and money to free her from her bondage.

They had been at a ball at the same house. Lord Briar did not patronise decent society. When the time came to leave, Lady Briar's carriage had not appeared, she was nervous, and professed herself afraid to go in a cab. Mr. Pierson immediately placed his brougham at her disposal, and started off to walk himself through the deserted streets in the dearest time of the London night. He arrived at home and admitted himself by a latch-key, and went straight to his study, where he found awaiting him Lady Briar alone with a face of marble. Curtis had admitted her on her arrival, for seeing her in his master's brougham he had imagined she came with his sanction. He did not exactly say that he had listened at the library door, but seeing that he gave Miss Denver a *résumé* of what had passed in that room, the corollary was evident.

Lady Briar had determined to make her lord divorce her, since she could not divorce him; she knew that he was the type of man who would steal a horse while not suffering another person to look over a gate, and that the slightest indiscretion on her part would rouse him to fury. She had no predilection for evil-doing, and had selected Mr. Pierson as her scapegoat because no whisper of any tender feeling had ever passed between them and he was the only man whom she could trust implicitly. This was the story which she told him when he found her in his study.

He had used all his endeavours to dissuade her from this monstrous scheme, but when he found her determined, and when she piteously demanded the sacrifice from him, altogether ignorant of its terrible cost, he had assented, and had made light of it. He was rich in this world's goods, the slur on his reputation was nothing to one who cared little for the world's opinion and who had vowed never to marry, and he would have done more than that to rescue a woman who appealed to him from a life of indescribable anguish.

Thus it was, and thus it happened.

There was a divorce case with no defence, the correspondent did not appear. Curtis and the coachman were called as witnesses, to prove that the lady had arrived between two and three o'clock in the morning and had passed the rest of the night in the house with Mr. Pierson. Yet even then the evidence was slight, and Lord Briar might have had difficulty in proving his case, had there not been other evidence forthcoming that Mr. Pierson and the lady had been seen about in public places together, and that shortly before he had given her a valuable necklet.

As a matter of fact, this necklet had come into his hands as a bad debt; she had admired it and he given it to her, with careless generosity, as he had no

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use for it himself, and she strangely and indiscreetly, though as it turned out happily for herself, had accepted it, though it must be noted in extenuation that she had no idea of its great value.

There was one sentence in the recital which persistently recurred to Miss Denver's mind, "A man who had vowed never to marry." Curtis was quite certain of the words, but knew of nothing in relation to them—in fact, he had been in Mr. Pierson's service only six months when the divorce case came on, and was ignorant of his master's former life; he was inclined to dismiss them lightly as the words of a man in the ignorant days of bachelorhood, but Miss Denver knew better. Mr. Pierson was not a man to throw words broadcast, and having regard to the context they must be taken with extra sincerity. She had not arrived at the end of her investigation yet; a man who was quixotic enough to allow a slur on his own reputation, and to pay costs for the sake of a woman who was nothing to him, might be quixotic enough to imagine himself bound by some youthful scrape. Having to her own satisfaction removed the supposed obstacle on Marion's side, Miss Denver set about removing the obstacle which lay on Mr. Pierson's side.

Marion had not yet returned from abroad, and before she did so Miss Denver took a farmhouse on the coast of North Miningshire for some of the more delicate of her *protégées*. She averred that the bracing air of the east coast was what they wanted, but she had a double motive. She had discovered that Mr. Pierson had returned from Germany, and was again in the north.

Bare and bleak as the county of North Miningshire was, devastated by smoke, and honeycombed with collieries, so that every working day no less than sixty thousand men and boys burrowed underground like moles, yet once, before coal had been discovered,

the county had been richly wooded, plentifully watered, broken and diversified by hill and valley, luxuriant in vegetation and celebrated for its forests. Remnants of this epoch remained even now in the great chines, or, as the north-country people called them, "denes," that ran down to the coast; denes where rare specimens of wild flowers grew, and butterflies found nowhere else in England flourished. It was to one of these sheltered denes that Miss Denver brought her family of half a dozen pale rickety children, and the same number of anæmic young milliners for a month's holiday.

The house stood half a mile from the shore, and the Duntail colliery was only seven or eight miles inland.

Miss Denver waited not a day after her settlement before writing to Mr. Pierson and asking if she might bring her young milliners some day to explore the coal-pit; she added that if he cared to come over and call upon her on the following Sunday, it might be easier to arrange details verbatim.

The snare had not been laid in sight of the bird, therefore the bird walked straight into it. At about four o'clock on Sunday afternoon Mr. Pierson drove up to the farmhouse, and was directed to find Miss Denver in a peculiarly shady seat in the dene. She was alone, her girls and infants dispersed upon the shore; and as she gripped his hand her eyes brightened.

He spoke of his willingness to oblige her in any way.

"But there's not much for them to see," he said. "The strike still continues, though I think we see daylight now. There is no work going on down there except some absolutely necessary repairs which the union kindly permits us to do."

"That's good enough for us."

He suggested a day in the coming week.

She asked abruptly how long he intended to be in the north himself. At least ten days or a fortnight

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he told her, for he was bound to attend the conciliation board sitting in the town ; in the intervals he amused himself by carrying on further experiments underground.

"Well, we'll leave it until nearer the end of the time," said Miss Denver. "The girls need all the fresh air they can get at present, but perhaps by then they would like a little expedition." She did not add that by that time she hoped to have her niece Marion Halsted with her.

They settled various points as to time and conveyance, and he assured her that even if he were not there himself his overman Redman should have instructions to show them everything. Miss Denver saw that she could not move all the pawns, something must be left to Providence, and she inwardly uttered a devout wish that Providence might carry out its part without bungling.

"And now," she said abruptly, "we have done with business. I know of a man who made a vow never to marry ; it's very pretty and romantic, and I shouldn't mind hearing the true history of it."

Mr. Pierson started slightly, but did not ask where she had obtained her information.

"Come," she said "we are very old friends ; confidence is not so difficult as all that."

"I am out of practice."

"Or never had any. Make a beginning."

"I would tell you, Miss Denver, willingly, but to speak of oneself——"

"Tell it to me in the third person then."

He sat for so long in silence that she was about to speak again when he began.

"There was a young man fresh from college who had begun to see a career open before him, but he had not much of this world's goods. He went to live as guest with a friend ; the friend was many years his senior, but he had a wife, a young wife. Her face



more nearly approached the ideal of the Madonna than any I have ever seen. Very fair it was, with an expression of childlike innocence and purity, touched with a breath of wonder as of a mystery unseen. For ten years the young man lived in this house beside that face. It was to him the incarnation of divinity. He would not have disturbed its serenity by a hint or suspicion of his adoration. The husband was careless, not a bad fellow, but neglectful. He had married for money, and been disappointed to find his estimate mistaken; he was not openly cruel, but quite callous; he threw his wife and his paying guest together with complete indifference as to consequences; sometimes he stayed away. Yet during all those years the young man was very busy, brain and hands were tested with days of anxiety and nights of late work, and he had no time for morbidity or introspectiveness; this perhaps was what saved him from evil. He held the ethereal face before him as a benign influence, and it permeated all his work and kept his actions straight. No word of love ever passed his lips, yet before he left I think both knew.

"The young man thought it was the love of his life. He imagined himself to be a man of strong self-control, who would never be utterly swept off his feet by emotion, and he thought he could remain all his life in the attitude of reverent worship, and desire no nearer tie.

"After he had left the house for about two years the wife telegraphed to him, asking him to go to her husband, who had been hurt in an accident away from home, for she was too ill to go herself. The man went; he found he was too late, the husband was dead. He returned to break the news to the woman, and found her fragile, wasted, more changed than he could have thought possible in two years. He stayed with her until the end. They spoke of their love in a

detached, spiritual kind of way, and she said she would always wait for him beyond. It seemed to him then that he should go utterly to the bad, as if life without that serene guiding face would be chaos. He told her so. She said she would still be there, unseen, but always waiting and watching. He vowed by all he held most sacred to keep single all his life for her sake, and to marry none other ; the vow was undertaken as solemnly in the sight of God as a marriage vow, and only differed from it in having no human witnesses. She smiled with joy and peace and left him. Before they buried her she had two wedding rings on her finger."

He stopped.

The story was so unlike the strong genial man as she had always known him that for the first time in her life Miss Denver felt embarrassed. She had noticed in him a subtle change before he had begun to speak, and the story had emphasised it. During the recital his optimism had dropped away from him like an outer garment. She had seen his face drawn and lined, and she had noted his shoulders were rounded and his clothes hung loosely on him. He looked an older man by ten years since she had last met him. And with the keen piercing insight which underlay all her bluntness she knew that he was bitterly expiating his vow ; that the ideal of a young man's dream had faded into its proper perspective as an ideal only beside the one real passion of his life ; that the former was mild and colourless, the latter rich and living.

She looked him full in the face. "Tell me the sequel," she said.

"That is my own concern."

"I know you better than you think. The time has come to break that vow."

"A slight thing ! Merely a recantation of the guiding principle of my whole life !"

"Principles and theories are all very well in their proper places, humanity comes first. Theories have their place, but there are cases——"

"In which they may be set aside? And you think that time has come for me? I can only say I differ from you."

"Men and women are not made of cast iron; this is not ignoble advice——"

"No. In your opinion any principle should be set aside directly it begins to cause pain?"

"No. But such pain!" Never had Augusta Denver spoken with so much feeling in her life.

He looked at her curiously. "You are very good to take so much interest in me, Miss Denver, but remember I have only tacitly admitted a certain possibility in order to argue the question with you."

"I did not need your admission; I knew the fact beforehand. Oh, you make me angry! You pretend to be so strong, so indifferent, but I can see your secret, I can read it in your face, in the lines marked there during the last year, in the weight that lies on your forehead——"

"I am growing old," he interpolated.

"Strong as you are, you have suffered as I perhaps can hardly imagine," she said almost triumphantly.

"There you are right," he replied quietly.

"And it is not yourself only you have to think of; you have caused——"

He stood up suddenly, and shook himself; for a moment only she feared him, then he said with his usual smile: "Now, Miss Denver, am I to see none of your youngsters?"

She rose, following his lead, but as she walked down the glen she stamped forcibly.

"Meet they shall," she said to herself, "and we'll see which is the stronger, the dead or the living!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### "DOWN INTO THE PIT."

"For no end? Not so! But for what? Oh, Thou Infinite Unknown, Thou only knowest."

V. HUGO (*trans.*).

"DON'T go!" Lu clung round Marion's neck in agonised protest. She had grown nearer to Marion's heart than ever during the month at Caudebec. Here she had begun her regular education for an hour every morning. Clemence had previously taught her her letters, but it was much nicer learning with "Mother." They were now at Castle Hawes, staying with Miss Denver, and the day planned for the expedition to the pit had come.

"This is foolish, Lu; I shall be back this evening, dear. I never knew you make such a fuss before. You have often done without me."

"If you must then, take me wif you."

"No, a pit is not a place for little girls. Bessie has promised me to look after you, and make you happy all the afternoon. Come, little goosey, give me a kiss, and let me go."

With passionate embrace Lu's lips clung to her adopted mother's, and then the arms relaxed, and the child dropped silently down, recognising the inevitable. Marion had consented to join this expedition to the pit on the distinct understanding that Mr. Pierson was still abroad. Miss Denver had casually mentioned that he had written to say his overman had instructions to show everything, and

she had not added that this was only in case Mr. Pierson himself should not happen to be there. Marion was starting earlier than her hostess, in order to drive round by Tail-Upon-End to see Mrs. Dyson and make inquiries after Mrs. Rawson. She took with her one or two of the girls, and the others were to go direct to the Duntail colliery in a waggonette with Miss Denver herself.

It was a fine day, very warm and dry, with little wind. The sun shone with a trying glare, and the dust rose from the black roads in puffs under the horses' feet.

At Tail-Upon-End Mrs. Dyson, prim, grim, and respectable as ever, greeted her former mistress with sardonic cheerfulness. The interior of the house was transformed, every corner was spick and span, every vestige of dirt driven out. Mrs. Rawson herself, though very feeble and completely bedridden, was clean and well cared for. Marion asked if the scamp Jim had given any trouble to his relatives.

"Na, he lives on what he gets from the union, and never a penny of his money do I or the old lady see," said Mrs. Dyson; "but so long as he keeps civil I've nowt to dee wi' him." She had relaxed wholly into the north country idiom of her childhood.

"But he was dismissed before the strike, I understand. Does the union keep him?" Marion asked in surprise.

"He wor a sacrificed mon as they ca' it, before ivvor this strike, so he gets his ten shillin' a week like the rest, and all he gets he drinks. He had a bout wi' Pierson the other day."

"Is Mr. Pierson in the district?" Marion asked quickly.

"He is that. He's working down the pit ivery day at the end of the Winny way. Jim wor sayin' only yesterday he canna mak' oot what he does, he mostly goes down at noon, and comes up between four

and five. Maybe you'll see him if you're gannin' there.”

Marion left the house with perturbed feelings. She felt and resented Miss Denver's concealment of this fact. The concealment was evidently deliberate, for only a day or two before Mr. Pierson's name had been mentioned between them, and Miss Denver had triumphantly related the story she had heard from Curtis the butler, in refutation of the well-known divorce and scandal, but of his visit to Castle Hawes or his presence in the neighbourhood she had said not a word.

Marion had been glad to hear the vindication, but at the time she had been surprised to find how little difference it made in her estimate of the man, *that* had been formed once and for ever. She had reached the highest platform, that of perfect trust ; fact itself did not weigh down the balance against her knowledge of him as he was. She had even, by instinct only, gone very near the truth in guessing that for some heroic reason he had accepted the slur of some one else's crime in silence.

But to hear that he was near her, in all probability down the very pit where she was going, that was a different matter.

Noble he might be, the highest ideal of manhood, yet he had once and for ever shown definitely that he did not love her, and to meet him was more than she could bear.

It was necessary certainly to deliver up her charges to Miss Denver at the Duntail colliery, and then she could return by herself to Castle Hawes.

Redman met the party at the mouth of the shaft, and said that the others had already descended and were waiting below. The big girls in Marion's charge giggled convulsively when she told them she was not coming, and, after a subdued whispering among themselves, announced that they would not descend alone

with that man. There was nothing for it but to go down in the cage with them. Once at the foot Miss Denver was easily found, and Marion drew her aside and expressed her intentions coldly, without reference to Mr. Pierson. Aunt Augusta stared at her in blank amazement. "My dear girl, why this whim? Do you suppose Redman and I can manage all this crew alone? We are counting on you as the mainspring of the party; what has come over you?"

Marion shrugged her shoulders in annoyance. Impossible to mention his name!

"Besides, you can't possibly go up again; the cage is only working for us, and not running all the time."

During this short colloquy various small divergencies had been made to inspect the engines, and the stable, now empty, and then the overman announced his intentions.

"We'll go right down the Winny way," he said. "It's clearest and in the best order just now; you all follow me up close."

He started off, and the girls, provided with glow-worm lamps, filed in behind.

Marion clutched Miss Denver's arm. "I'm not going," she said decisively. "Nothing shall make me go. If I can't get out by myself at all events I stay here."

Miss Denver knew that by some unlucky chance her scheme had been discovered; she snorted. "Do as you please," she said curtly, and she ponderously brought up the rear of the procession.

Marion sat in the overman's cabin and waited; she was exasperated and sore, feeling that she had been entrapped into a humiliating position, and she was more angry with Miss Denver than she could have believed possible. What right had any one to interfere in other people's affairs without knowing the whole facts of the case?

The cabin was a rough, weird place, and presently,

realising that there was no immediate danger of detection, Marion began to look about her. There was a strong wooden table, hacked and hewn, uneven rocky walls and roof. The shadows lay blackly in all the corners, starting from the miner's lamp which stood on the table. At first she was too indignant and too much taken up with her own thoughts to notice the intense loneliness and stillness of the pit, but by degrees they began to saturate her, and to soak into her bones, and she moved uneasily. It was very, very lonely, and very still. She stepped out of the cabin into the darkness, leaving her lamp where it was. She heard the slow drip, drip of water falling from the top of the shaft into profound space. She walked across to the shaft and looked up; the tiny round hole at the summit showed like a frame of white light enclosing a miniature image of a suspended cage. A splash of coaly water fell on her face, she shuddered and drew back. She had imagined that there would be little sounds all round, unnoticed in the light, but very prominent now, such as the grating of coal dust, small cracks and groans; but there was absolutely nothing except that dropping water and the moaning of the wind. She heard the latter far away, a continuous complaint like the cry of a sweet-voiced woman in pain; it was indescribably dreary and depressing. She could not have believed that any place would be so silent. Beyond the circle of light falling from the door of the cabin the darkness was as profound as the silence.

She was about to return to that friendly light, when she heard far off the sound of a footfall. A shudder of apprehension chilled her; the pit she knew could be reached by a ladder shaft which came up in the centre of a field, there was nothing to prevent any man's coming down. She held her breath, then she thought she must have been mistaken, for the sound died away; but it came again



much nearer and more distinct than at first. She could distinguish some particulars about it now. It was the step of some one who knew his way well, it was too light for a man, too certain and skilful for a woman, it must be a boy. She breathed more freely ; she was not afraid of a boy, yet she felt oddly nervous, as if something were clutching at her heart. The boy, whoever he was, evidently knew every foot of the way : he came on quickly like a cat, without stumbling or pausing, and when he turned the last corner she saw the flicker of a lantern he carried. She snatched up her own lamp and held it aloft ; he stopped for a minute on seeing the light and then came forward again, and when she judged him near enough, she cried, "Who's there?" Her voice sounded hollow in the emptiness.

The boy apparently knew her by sight, for he approached quite close, and peering up at her said, "Is't thoo Miss Halsted?"

"Yes, do you want me?"

There was something indescribably eerie in hearing her own name called by an unknown voice in that great silence.

"I was to gie this to Miss Halsted and none other," he said slowly, and handing her a note he turned to fly the way he had come.

"Stop, stop a minute, I want to ask you some questions."

"I dursent. Ef the overman catches ma, he'll flay the life oot o' ma."

"Who sent you? And how did you get in?"

"Mrs. Dyson o' Tail-Upon-End, and I cam' by the ladders, and a'm gannin' oot that way and a'."

He darted off.

Marion set her lamp on the hacked table, and with difficulty deciphered the note, which was written in the angular characters common to half-educated people :

"Jim's had a fall while in drink, and he's queer in the head. He's ravin' about having done for Mr. Pierson down the pit. He went in this morning, Jim did, by the ladders, and put a charge of dynamite in the way where Mr. Pierson 'll come out. He's working to-day at the second south turning of the Polka way, not in the Winny way. You can stop him maybe, and warn him, for if he treads on them he'll be a dead man. I've sent a lad as knows his way to find you ; but, mum, don't say as who's done it. Jim's my own dead brother's child.

**"SARA DYSON."**

The immediate necessity for action often paralyses by its intensifying rush. Marion turned the note stupidly in her hand, and stared at it. Somewhere in her consciousness of locality there was such a place as the Polka way, but she could not fix it. Then her brain cleared, she buried her face in her hands, and thought until the whole plan of the seam she was in leapt out in black and white before her. Mechanically she looked at her watch. It was four-thirty ; he might come out any minute. Her mind leapt from point to point. Tell any one ? Warn any one ? Who ? There was no one to tell until the party came back. It might be interminably delayed, and unless warned by five o'clock Mr. Pierson would be a dead man.

Warn him herself ? But how ? By going. The only way to fly herself through the jaws of death to carry life ! If she failed, why, then, he would probably hear the explosion, and be warned, and in any case the deadly charge would have had its victim and demand no other. She mentally mapped the course she was to take into sections. The first, the broader way by the tram-lines, until the junction was reached. Not likely to be any danger here—the snare would have been laid nearer to the intended victim in the narrower part where his foot would more easily find

it. Then there would be the tedious way, narrower and more dangerous in the second south turning, and lastly the gateway.

She sprang to her feet and started off, calling dumbly in her heart to God for help.

She could traverse the first part of the way upright, though her foot was not so sure as that of the boy who had come to her out of the darkness. After one or two stumbles she found a comparatively smooth path by the side of the lines. There were two sets of rails on different levels with the vacant tubs standing on them in rows. Underfoot the ground was smooth and hard though narrow; even in her haste she could have seen any unusual lump, and have avoided it. Wires ran overhead and wire ropes were beside her. The drab walls of rough-hewn stone repeated themselves monotonously on either side. For half a mile she hurried on without stopping, only saying breathlessly now and again, "O God, help me! O God, help me!"

Suddenly a noise in the intense stillness startled her. She pulled up in her stride and caught her breath; was he coming out? Should she meet him face to face here, and in safety, her mission accomplished, the risk run, and the blood-money undemanded? Or would he in advancing, with ever lessening distance between them, fall on the snare before her very eyes, and be snatched away into nothingness as he came within speaking distance?

Directly she listened intently, she discovered that the noise which had awakened so many thoughts with the celerity of dreams was nothing more than water rushing tumultuously out of the rock on one side of the way, and gurgling into pipes a few yards farther on. The start had set her nerves on edge, and she swung her lamp high to see what was ahead, the long drab gallery, framed in upright and horizontal timber, stretched on in perspective the same as ever. But

what was that which burst in upon the regularity of the vista? A few yards farther on the rounded whiteness of a gigantic snow-figure was outlined against the gloom.

Marion had but that belief in ghosts which is common to every ordinarily educated person, an attitude of "I don't deny that there may be such things, but I have never yet come across one, and I don't believe I ever shall!" And now all at once leaped in her heart the paralysing conviction, "It has come, it has come! I am numbered among the band of ghost-seers!"

Her blood turned to water, she was enveloped in sheer terror; unstrung already, the vision swamped her, it was as if she had come up suddenly against the end of all things, and met a presentment of the judgment day incarnate. She neither shrieked nor stirred, she was lost in time and space, a feeling not a person.

Then in a moment more she laughed aloud at her unreasonable fright, for the bogie had resolved itself into an inanimate object, a mass of cotton-wool of fleecy whiteness, falling in great rounded curves from the damp walls. Why cotton-wool was there she did not stop to consider, not knowing that this was a fungus, sometimes found in disused pits, resembling cotton-wool in appearance. She upbraided herself for her foolishness, but in truth the angel of death had seemed so near, that to meet an awful messenger had appeared no great stretch of imagination.

The way grew lower beyond, she had to bend considerably. She paused at the first turning off the main or Polka way. A set of rails curved off here to north and south; under low lintel of timber these were the first north and first south turnings. Just beyond there had been a fall of stone from the roof, and the repairers had not yet removed it. Massive blocks of stone were half buried in a pile of rubble, and

the jagged ends of smashed beams stuck out menacingly to bar her path. Here, if anywhere, the snare might lie, embedded in the rubbish; but with scarcely a thought of danger she scrambled over, squeezing between the rubble pile and the roof.

It was not long before she reached the second south turning, and when she recognised the opening she plunged into it.

The little gleaming rails curved away beneath a much lower roof than that in the Polka way; indeed, it seemed difficult to believe that ponies could pass below. A good deal of stone had fallen here, and it was impossible to walk cleanly as heretofore. Stooping so as to avoid striking her head against the uneven roof, Marion scrambled along as best she could. All at once her foot crashed through a pile of rubbish, and she thought her hour had come, she imagined she had found the dynamite. Her nerve gave way suddenly. Physical terror gripped her: the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak, a kind of paralysis seemed to bind her. She had arrived so far on her journey in safety, but the real danger had only begun. Her vivid imagination had wrought out the blinding roar, the deafening crash, the grinding of stone on living flesh and muscle which might follow another such footstep. She could have screamed, but set her teeth instead. Impossible to force forward her unwilling feet—she felt she could not go on. Just as the past is said to rise up before a drowning man, so it did before her—her life with all its warmth and humanness, with those whom she knew, with the trees, the fields and flowers, the air and sunshine, and set against it in the balance was a blank void, an awful unknowingness. Her faith had seemed strong enough in daily life, but face to face with the great beyond she discovered that, in order to give comfort, it must be a part of herself, a sheet-anchor, and not merely a form of words which might or might not be true.

Death, so familiar in name, so grisly in reality, had actually touched her, and her strong life coursed in her veins rising up to repel it with nausea ; life revolted from death, life brimming over in its full flood-tide, not worn down by age or illness to the point of insensibility. Besides, her sacrifice might never be discovered, and here lay the bitterness. Mrs. Dyson would keep silence for her nephew's sake ; to speak would be to put a noose round his neck, and no one else knew.

Marion knew that if she resolved to go forward she would have to go out into the great aloneness without one friendly thought. A year ago, though she had been full of high motive, the torrent of egotism would have checked her from this terrible and unknown sacrifice, and she would not have been capable of it ; but now she had been curbed and tamed by her love for another. He might be indifferent to her, she might never see him, yet while he lived life was sweet. In the flash of an eye she looked upon the future as it would be without him, a world of ghosts, an impalpable dream, a long vista of loneliness, and if she hesitated she risked his life ! This was not the highest motive, she was not of the stuff of which heroines are made, heroines who risk their lives for persons hardly known to them, and who never consider whether their sacrifice will be lost in oblivion or not ; she had not risen to that yet, but she had reached the point at all events where she loved some one better than herself, which is the first step.

She saw a vision of the world as it would be without him, and from that almost selfish standpoint she was precipitated into heroism. It is thus that God raises his children by making their faults the starting-point of great deeds.

Ah, while Stephen Pierson lived life was sweet ! Better death, maiming, mutilation, horror, than a world in which he was not ! The matter fell apart

in two issues. Death for herself leaving him alive, or life with him dead. Her mind reasserted its sway, her trembling, paralysed limbs were forced to obedience, and with terrible self-condemnation for the hesitancy which might have cost his dear life she stumbled on.

The hundred yards seemed a mile, and then the roof lowered yet again, and Marion found herself crouching almost double in a tunnel not four feet high, a veritable rabbit warren, plentifully bestrewn with loose stone. Her breath came fast with the unwonted exertion, she tripped on her skirt and clutched at the wall to save herself. The way was an eternity. It was merely a little passage, too narrow for the full stretch of a man's arm, framed in a series of two timber uprights and a horizontal beam. One hundred yards of this was task enough to try a strong man accustomed to such holes, to her it was severe exertion; but she had lost the sense of her personality, she had lost all fear, her anxiety was merged in glad triumph—now she should save him! At places she could stand upright for a second and straighten her back, and then she was forced down again into the tunnel.

The roof grew higher as she neared the "gateways," which were cross passages leading to the face of the coal. When she emerged in one of these she could walk without stooping. It was full of loose blocks of stone, cut out by the men before they had abandoned work, and not since removed, but it was wide and comparatively high. This part of the pit was worked on the Long Wall system. Along the face was a narrow passage, one hundred yards or more in length, and into this at right angles the gateways opened.

Marion had gone straight into the first gateway that faced her, and as she stumbled heavily over a block of stone near the entry her lamp slipped from

her hand and went out. She was enveloped in a garment of darkness—darkness that could be felt. An icy despair succeeded her glad confidence. She listened breathlessly ; there was no sound far or near, not even the dropping of water, or the boring of the worms in timber. It was a dead stillness, the absolute zero of sound. Had she mistaken the directions and arrived at the wrong part of the face ?

Easy for an experienced man to do !

Had Mrs. Dyson in her haste quoted a wrong turning ?

Easy for an uneducated woman to do !

A hundred possibilities of wrong for one of right ! No sound and no light ! A couple of miles of uncertain way between her and the shaft !

It is perhaps difficult for an inexperienced person to understand the appalling situation. To grope one's way in perfect darkness about a well-known house with high ceilings and smooth walls is difficult, but to do so in an unfamiliar mine, next to impossible. It would mean crawling along, feeling with worn and bleeding hands the rough walls, all the time in imminent danger of striking one's head ; never knowing whether one had not missed a turning and was not going farther and farther into the heart of the earth. Even an overman, whose lamp suddenly goes out in the workings, with hewers within reach of him and having a minute acquaintance with the roads, is in an unpleasant position. It was quite possible that Marion might wander for hours, perhaps days, without food and waterless, for no one knew where she was, and with all the good will in the world it would be difficult to find her. To add to the horror of the situation, there was the fact that Mr. Pierson was still in danger, that she, the only person who could have saved him, was now imprisoned, powerless, within black walls of stone ; she was bound hand and



foot in the unbreakable bonds of darkness. Was ever torture so devised ?

In these decisive moments character rests on its bedrock, and all extraneous things are washed away, shams disappear, and the pulsation of the everlasting heart of things can be felt. It had been ordained from the beginning that she should thus suffer, that she should be reduced, absolutely alone, to the brink of an appalling despair. The terrific force of the catastrophe surged round her ; she pictured Mr. Pierson even now setting his foot on the fatal charge. She sank down where she stood, and sent up one of those voiceless prayers, in which the whole being is a prayer, and by the force of faith seems almost to touch the Deity in actual contact. Then she waited, the quietness of resignation had stolen over her, she almost longed to die ; death, which had seemed so appalling before, was apparently not to be granted to her as a boon. She would in time be exhumed from this tunnel, to find that he, for whom she would have sacrificed that life, had passed away from her for ever.

She felt almost as if she were a detached spirit, and had left behind all earthly things.

Then all at once a faint far-away sound like the whistling of the wind in a chink beat upon her ear. In a moment her faculties were on the alert, the blood rushed to her head, and she could hear nothing for its throbbing. Then she reached forward, and with new determination crawled, feeling her way over the sharp-edged blocks, toward the "face." She knew when she had reached it, by feeling it like a dead wall opposite to her.

She crouched down there to listen, and the whistling broke out clear and strong, piercing the terrible stillness. It was no dead wind that made the sound, but human breath.

Marion felt the comparatively smooth face of the seam with her left hand, and followed it onward in

the direction of that blessed sound of hope. The wall curved gradually until the slow dawn of reflected light shone upon the curve like the dawn of morning rising on a newly created world. It grew brighter, and she crept on, fighting with emotion. Round the obstructing end of one of the gateways she came upon the sources of both the light and the sound, she had found the man whom she had sought! She saw the gleam of his lamp reflected on the black wall, and her heart leapt until her emotion nearly choked her. She had saved him! Now that she had achieved her end she stood there hesitating. She liked to think she held his life in the hollow of her hand. Then with a sudden impulse, in two swift movements, she stood by the corner of the gateway. He was crouching down with his back to her, and the brilliant star of his electric lamp made the shadows blacker than ink. On the rough broken floor were tools and the notebook in which he had been jotting down data and making calculations. It was what is called in pit idiom "a fine place"; that is to say, the seam four feet thick and the roof six feet high.

He turned quickly at the sound of her footstep, and the starlike point of his lamp shone like a scintillating jewel, bathing her in radiance from head to foot. Her face was white and ghostly as she stood out against the hard black shadows. He had no thought of reality; this was a vision that had come to him, such a vision as he had heard men speak of but never expected to see, a projection of his thought visualised. He dared not move again lest it should vanish, and when the one low adoring word, "Marion!" had broken from him, he remained as he was kneeling on one knee.

To her that word told all. In his thought she was Marion, she knew that she was beloved, and the radiance of a joy unknown, unconceived, bathed her soul and lit it up as the electric light lit up her person.

She too remained motionless. Then, after a moment's happy silence, she sank down on the ground with a little laugh. "It's all right, I have saved you!" she said.

The tremendous intensity of his gaze wavered: he would never have looked at her like that with his soul in his eyes had he deemed her flesh and blood. He faltered, and his manner told his thought.

"I am no ghost," said she cheerfully, "but flesh and blood. Touch me," and she held out her left hand to him. He took it, and in a moment more he was beside her, and how she knew not, but she was on his knee leaning against him, her face to his face, lip to lip, eye to eye, his kisses enthralling her, his personality enfolding her; she was his.

"My sweet," he murmured, "my darling, man or fiend or devil shall not tear you from me. Marion, Marion!" And the word as he spoke it was a most tender and loving caress. "I hold you and shall hold you for ever. I have fought, I am beaten. God knows I have struggled. I was a fool! The vow has snapped, and nothing in the world matters but your love. Oh, my sweet, I love you, I love you!"

The deepest silence, fraught with exquisite bliss succeeded. Her arms were round his neck, her face nestled into him, she did not speak, she did not move; she could not, the sudden revulsion, the great flood-tide of his love, thus unexpectedly released, swept down upon her, and carried her away unresisting in its sweetness. Once far away in the dim regions of time she too had said with all the intensity of which she was capable, "I love you!" but the force of her words compared with his was as the light of a candle to the electric spark that glistened and scintillated on the strangest theatre for a love scene that has been since the world began. She kept her face buried deeply, and she felt his lips on her neck and ear, she felt them on her forehead and eyebrows, and on her

hair, and she clung to him with a passionate, fierce embrace that death alone could loose.

"Marion, Marion," he murmured. "Live without you? No. Vow or no vow, you are mine. It was a snare of the devil to keep us apart. God knows I do no wrong to break loose. I fought against yielding. For weeks and months after I knew you I never dreamed that you could care for me, so I had that barrier against myself; and then you came, you said, 'I love you,' and if you had not fled nothing could have held me back, nothing could have prevented my answer; but you fled, and I fled also from temptation. I resolved not to see you, not to go near you. I strove to keep my vow, I did not see that a vow made in the blindness of ignorance cannot bind for eternity, and for eternity we are together. We have already passed away from the old world, all things are become new!" He paused for a moment and then went on, "You have dominated me, and it is you only I will have. I, self-centred, self-complacent, I never lived until now, I knew nothing. I was poor and feeble and devitalised. My love, my darling, tell me you will never leave me. It is pain to think we can ever be less near than at this moment, tell me, tell me——"

"Never," she murmured, but the stupendous emotion which possessed her made her eyes fill with tears and her lips tremble.

"It is worth while to have lived through all time for this moment," he began suddenly, with a little joyous laugh. "I tried to live without you, I thought I knew love, and had tested it. I had never even seen it! Oh, my sweet, my sweet!"

It was as though he had no words to express the great tenderness with which he would engulf her. Suddenly a sense of her uncompleted mission aroused her.

"Darling," she said, making a feeble attempt to release herself, "I came here to warn you to save

yourself, to tell you—O God, to think that I faltered! Could it be I?"

He tried to prevent her talking, to relapse into the same heaven of bliss oblivious of all earthly things, but she would not.

Slowly and disjointedly she gave her message; and he laughed aloud, holding her still, so that she could feel the strong throbbing of his heart.

"You came to tell me—you risked your life! For me!" And he was silent, but his silence spoke more intensely than words, for his thought had out-run words.

It seemed a long time before he spoke again. "Danger!" he said. "What does it matter? What does anything matter now we are together?"

"Yet life is sweet," said she.

"Ah yes, sweet, so unutterably sweet, that we must needs go through the jaws of death to gain it."

"I would almost rather die here and now," she said, "because away in the world again we may not always be together, close, you and I. There are claims and distractions, there may be shadows between us, you and I, and the very thought is such keen pain it strikes me like a knife. I could not bear it. And then there are others to look on at us, and know too, and comment on our love, and it is too sacred. I want it always kept here just between us two so that no one sees or knows it."

"Marion, your very thoughts are mine; you are my other self. I think I always felt it from the very first time I saw you, but I would not own it even to myself; we think with one mind, we can never be apart again, for our spirits have touched and coalesced; it is no longer yours and mine, but both in each, even out of sight still together."

"Still together, always together, always for ever, you and I!"

But the mainspring of action had been stirred, and

they moved together to the entry of the gateway. Then his alert practical faculties began to assert themselves.

"Some one may come in to find me," he said. "We must not leave him to face unnecessary risk, we must tear ourselves away even from this place." And he spoke as though it were some holy and gorgeous shrine rather than a dark coal-hole.

"I know a way through a disused working into the return airway by which we can reach the shaft. The trap will not have been laid in this, but we must travel some hundred yards along the main way first to reach the entrance," he continued after a pause.

So they started, he in front and she behind, with the brilliant glitter of his little electric lamp thrown on every careful step. Holding her breath, and treading in his footsteps, Marion followed him; the dark and rough way was transformed into a golden ladder from Heaven.

It took a long time, with this slow and cautious progress, to traverse the yards that lay between them and safety, but they did it at last, and Mr. Pierson stopped.

"The disused siding leaves the way here," he said, "but it has been blocked up. I must make a way so that we may get through."

Close beside him she stood while he worked, her breath on his cheek, her sleeve touching his; as for danger, they had both forgotten it.

He tore down one stone after another in his great capable hands, tearing away the rubbish until the hole was large enough for a man's head and shoulders. The top layers had been loosely placed, but the lower ones were jammed together, and his hands were rasped and torn. At length he put his shoulder to the wall and burst it inwards, the stones rolled this way and that, and the dust rose blindingly. He waited, and as he waited Marion crept closer to him.

He put his left arm about her, and she captured his hand, grimy and bleeding with the work, and caressed it.

"Always together, you and I, always, always," she said as though she could never say it enough. As she spoke, a stone on one side of the hole, which had been weakened by the withdrawal of its supports, fell beyond them, on to that part of the main way they had not traversed. They sprang simultaneously aside to avoid it, there was a crash, a deafening roar, a violent shock, and the dynamite had done its work.

And whether they two, who had passed together as close as it is possible for two human beings to be, beneath the great curtain of mystery, the veil of death, travelled still onward side by side through infinity of space and time ;

Or whether they, whose paths had gradually converged until they touched, now wandered on in different spheres, unknowing and oblivious of one another as before their meeting ;

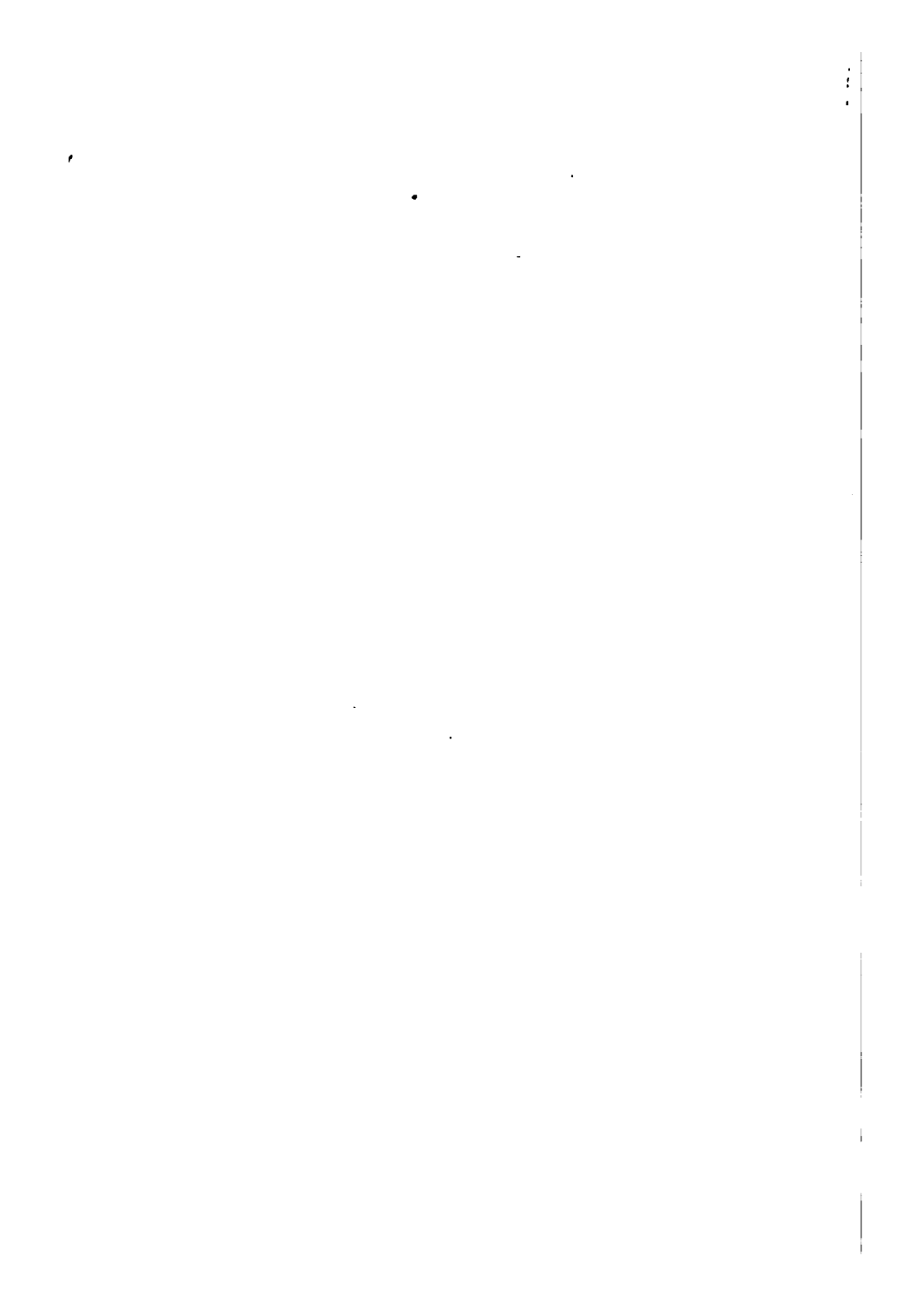
Or whether, having once touched, the spirits coalesced, and formed no more two, but one perfect whole, to worship in unending joy ;

No man can say, for man knoweth little of what happens even on earth, and of the mystery behind the veil he knoweth nothing !

THE END.









J. L. McALLISTER  
SA

